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'BLACK TALK':

BEING

NOTES ON NEGRO DIALECT

IN

BRITISH GUIANA

WITH (INEVITABLY)

A CHAPTER ON THE VERNACULAR OF BARBADOS.

BY

J. GRAHAM CRUICKSHANK,
Author of "Negro Humour," &c.

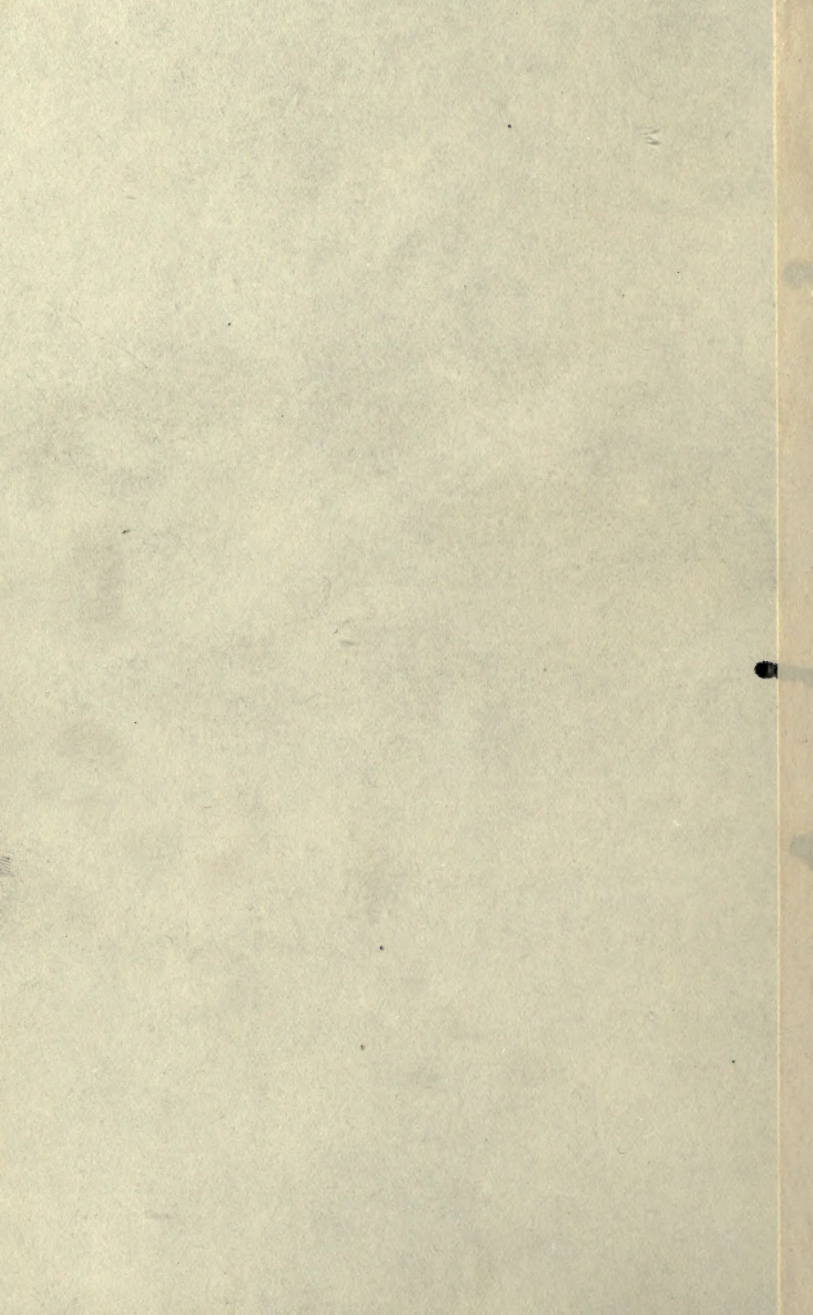


DEMERARA:

"THE ARGOSY" COMPANY, LIMITED.

1916

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Mr. Linn

(an old inhabitant
of "the Barbados")

from the Author

Toronto

Feb 7 1912



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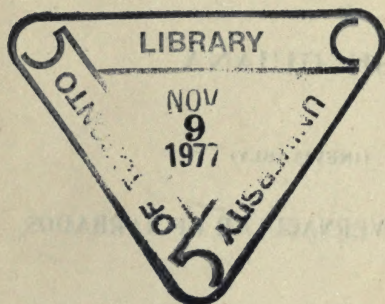
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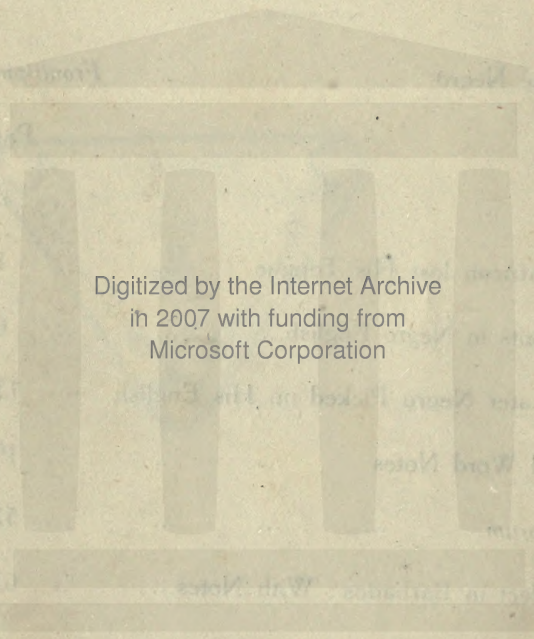
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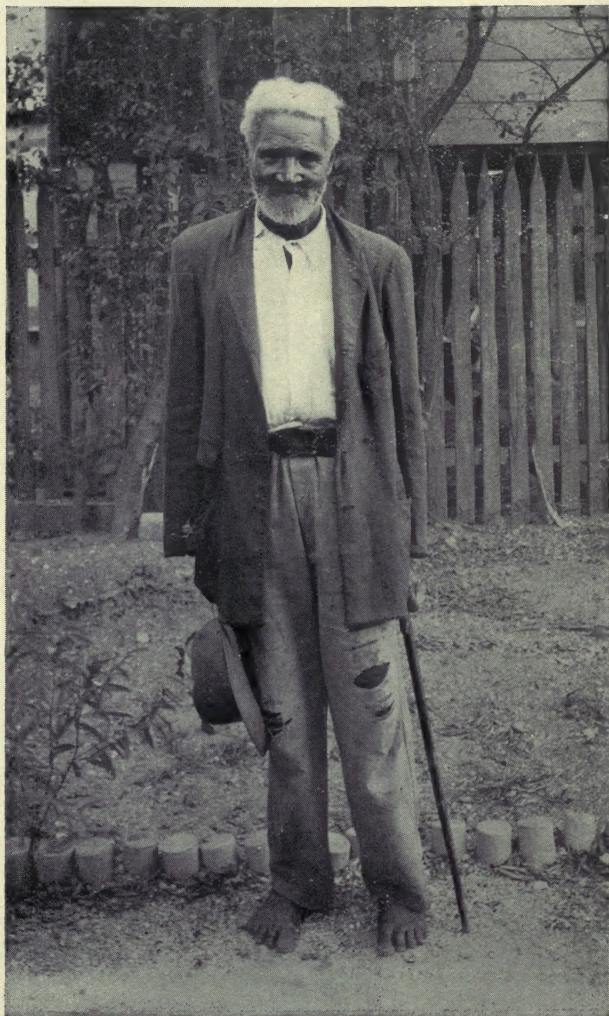
CONTENTS.

An Old-time Negro 	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
	Page.
Foreword 	i.
How the African lost His Tongue 	1
African Traits in Negro English... 	6
How the Later Negro Picked up His English ...	13
Phrase and Word Notes 	19
<i>Varia Variorum</i>	57
Negro Dialect in Barbados : With Notes... ...	63

CONTENTS



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AN OLD-TIME NEGRO.

FOREWORD.

THE Notes started in this way.

Ten years ago an old black man came to my back-door to beg. His face was wrinkled like leather and his head was as white as cotton. He was an old-time Negro.

"Massa, I beg a copper!"

"Old man," I said, "have you no family to support you? Have you no children?"

He played deaf. "Sah?"

"Have you no family?" I repeated.

"Massa, my family them all dead out."

"How do you live?"

"Sah?"

"How do you make out?"

"How me mek out?" He pointed upwards to the black rafters of the kitchen. "Tatta Fadda a mek provide-ance. He-self a gi'e me nyam."

This was well but vague.

"Do you get poor relief: you does get poor money?"

"Wan s'illing a week"—he held up one finger. "Da, no more."

"Are you hungry?"

"But look me trial!" said he apostrophising the coal-pot. He put his hand before an open mouth. "Hungry! Youse'f too!"

We had some more talk: he was an interesting veteran although his garb was so strikingly disreputable: and (with a bit burning a hole in his pocket) he went away.

Then I jotted down some of the words and phrases he had used—"dead out," "nyam," &c.—in a note-book; and resumed the framing of a judgmatic Audit Report.

It is natural, a window of the mind having been opened, that one notices things unobserved before. It was so with Negro Dialect. Phrases and words that one must have heard a hundred times attracted attention. A cook whom her

mistress had "rowed" aired her grievance on the road; and a word or two was added to the note-book. A cyclone swept the next yard; and quite a flow of quaint phrases fell into the ear of an attentive neighbour. The bread-boy wanted to know something: he did not say "What is the cause of it?" but (most crisply) "Wha' mek?" And so on. Week by week the note-book grew; first it had to be shaken into index form; and then it got big enough to need a name. I called it "Black Talk."

And now I print the best parts of "Black Talk"—"What must the worst parts have been like?" asks the pertinent reader—and hope that somebody here and there may think, with myself, that it was worth while. I have wished very often that that rare old Cavalier Richard Ligon, who wrote the first History of Barbados two hundred and fifty years ago, had given us just a page or two of the Barbados Negro English of that day. The old gentleman spreads himself on the Plantain, the Palmetto Royal and such vegetables; and is all too brief about the human element. He knew the Blacks, and gives a delightful little story of Sambo who "desired much to become a Christian." I wish he had given us his dialogue with Sambo—Sambo's part of it—just in the words of Sambo, *verbatim et literatim*.

And so with successive travellers. A page or two of Negro talk, undoctored, would have been a valuable contribution to philology.

Many of the words, word-senses, idioms and phrases heard to-day are dying out. In a few years they will have gone underground with the last of the old people. "There is no medicine against old age" says the Yoruba proverb. It is therefore well that they should be put on record—"one-time."

I preface the phrase and word notes with a remark or two—which I may dub a "Chapter"—on how and why the African lost his native tongue when he came westward. The talk of the black people in America is not African except in shreds. Chapter II. tries to pick out a few of those shreds, and does so with an incompetence which borders on brilliancy. Part of the survival of the African tongue takes the shape of genuine African words. Part of it takes the shape of English words—altered and done up

again in a characteristically African way. The most subtle survival of African is the survival of African idiom—in *Negro English*! The last phase is of peculiar difficulty, and is therefore of peculiar interest. To go into it properly one ought to be thoroughly up in the four or five main languages of West and Central Africa.

Next in sequence comes the Appendix. The chapter on Barbados is printed as an appendix—not because I am ignorant of the importance of that island: its importance is evident from its inevitable inclusion in this book at all—but because the sub-title of “Black Talk” appeared to require that if Barbados had to come in—and it had—it must be as a sort of postscript wherein (it may be recalled) is the germ of and justification for many a letter. It is impossible to exaggerate the debt Guiana owes Barbados. I do not mean as a health resort, because the time may come when one may exchange the sea-wind of Bathsheba for the upland air of the Rupununi. I mean from a historical point of view. A hundred and seventy years ago, at the instance of Commander Storm Van’s Gravesande, Demerara and Essequibo were thrown open to settlers of whatever nationality. The Barbados nation took prompt advantage of the open door. Many planters removed themselves, lock stock and barrel, from Barbados and came and struck root in the ample mudflats of Guiana. It was to the advantage both of Barbados and of Guiana that they did so. It may not have been to the ultimate advantage of the Dutch nation.

Now, when those planters—from Barbados chiefly—came down to Guiana they brought down with them the last man,—the most recent pickny,—of their Negro Slaves. And these brought along with *them*—it was all many of them had—whatever they had picked up of the King’s English! The Barbados Black was the missionary of King’s English to the Guiana Black. He scattered the seed—some of it already rather quaintly affected by the new environment—and it fell on the Guiana mudflat. The harvest of that seed is the English of Sarah in the next yard, of Peta at the stand-pipe, of the beggar with wrinkled black face and head like cotton. The Demerara Black did not get his English direct from the Englishman. He got it at second-hand. He got it from the Barbados Black.

Whom did the Barbados Black get it from? He got it mainly from the White Bondservant. Upon his ear fell the Devon dialect—from the Devonshire man as he hoed tobacco beneath the Barbados sun with the Negro. Irishmen talked to him—or at him—as, rebels both, they crouched over a fire in a cave at Boscobel. The Highlander even—traditionally taciturn—let fall a strange word now and then, and the Negro heard it and made it more strange than ever in the reproduction. Thus was the King's English—and the English of Old England when there was no King—planted in Barbados among the Blacks. How it took root and has been perpetuated is dwelt upon a little in the Appendix.

Chapter III. says somewhat of the later Black—the African slave landing in Guiana 120 years ago, and the liberated African imported 50 to 70 years ago—how he, in turn, picked up his English from the Creole Negroes.

The Phrase and Word notes follow. These could be added to, without doubt, by many a minister, doctor and planter of experience in British Guiana and in Barbados. It will appear, probably, that some of the most characteristic of all Negro words and phrases have been left out. I trust the omissions may be brought to light if they have.

To a few of the words I append British parallels taken from "The English Dialect Dictionary," edited by Professor Wright. I have also consulted Halliwell's "Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words." It is interesting to note that many of the words and word-senses used by the black people of British Guiana—and notably of Barbados—may be heard in the rural parts of Great Britain and Ireland. This is interesting but it is not at all surprising. It is only natural. It was the rural parts of Great Britain and Ireland that they came from! The surprising thing is when you find, as happens occasionally, that the word-sense has died out in Great Britain and that it has been left to the Blacks in America who got it two hundred and fifty years ago to guard it and keep it alive.

Finally there are printed a few Miscellaneous Jottings. These touch on such characteristic sides of Black Talk as Gesture, Intonation, Ellipsis, Redundancy, and so on.

HOW THE AFRICAN LOST HIS TONGUE.

WHEN one hears a black man in the West Indies talk English, one asks what has become of his native tongue? When and why was it dropped?

The old books of African voyages tell us a reason. The disintegration of the African dialects began with the Slave Trade. Had the majority of the Negroes whose descendants are now in the West Indies come hither as free men African might yet be spoken in the Caribbees and in Guiana. That they were imported as slaves made all the difference.

It was the policy of the slave trader—as he went “black-birding” on the West Coast, and filled the great hold of his ship with its human lading—to mix his languages. William Smith, Surveyor to the Royal African Company, made a voyage to Guinea in 1726. He notes:—“The languages in the Gambia are so many and so different that the natives on one side cannot understand those on the other, which is a great advantage to the Europeans who trade there for Slaves. . . . The safest way is to trade with different nations on either side, and having some of every sort on board there will be the less danger of any plot.” Captain John Atkins traded for slaves between Guinea, Brazil and the West Indies (1735). His advice is the same. Mix your languages, he says. Remember the Tower of Babel. What stopped the building of Babel—what brought up the brickmakers and masons and stone-cutters with a round turn—will stop the hatching of plots below-hatches. “When a cargo is of one language,” says the master-mariner, “caution is so much the more requisite.”

Here then was the first blight upon the African languages when the Negro westward turned his way.

What began in Africa was continued in the West Indies. The planter took care not to have too many Negroes of one nation on his estate. Greatly outnumbered by the Blacks, the sugar planters of the latter part of the 17th century, and of the 18th century, felt as though they were sitting on a gunpowder keg. At any moment an explosion might occur about their ears. Ligon, writing of Barbados, alludes to the

danger to the planter of living in the middle of a number of Blacks, "as near savages as might be." It had been accounted a strange thing (says Ligon), remembering their numbers, that they "should not commit some horrid massacre upon the Christians, thereby to enfranchise themselves and become masters of the island." But there were three reasons that took away this wonder. First, they were totally unarmed; second, they are held in such awe and slavery as they are fearful to appear in any daring act; and third—"which stops all designs of that kind"—they are "fetch'd from severall parts of Africa, who speak severall languages and by that means one of them understands not another."

The planter took care that no part of his estate became like that quarter of London in which, as Borrow tells us in "Lavengro," "the Irish live and where they hatch their villainies and speak their tongue; it is that which keeps them together and makes them dangerous."

On the other hand the planter had to foster a sort of homely atmosphere for the new Negro.

No time was more desolating in its effect on the new Negro—dejected and home-sick, just landed from the African slaver—than the first month in America. The planter called it "the seasoning." It was not merely, or so much, the process of acclimatization. The American climate was similar to, and usually rather better than, his own. It was the process of transplantation. Transplanting a rose-bush one has to coax it to take root again. It is not less difficult with a man. During "the seasoning" it was not uncommon for twenty per cent. of the landed Negroes to languish and die. They simply turned their faces to the wall. It was at this point that the tactful and far-seeing planter,—not anxious to hear too many strange languages, or too much of any one strange language spoken on his estate—kept alive the African tongue. Nothing more cheering could greet the "Salt Water" just landed at the water-side, than a group of his countrymen speaking in the Whiddah or Koromanty tongue. It would do more to make him feel at home than the largest calabash of gumbo and kalalu soup with a smack of palm-oil.

So long as the African Slave Trade lasted, so long would the ten or twenty African dialects heard in the West Indies—

with the arrival of the periodic slaver—be freshened up. They had no chance to die out. They had no chance even to become corrupt. They were kept fresh and sparkling by a periodic gush, even by a trickle, from the pure well of African undefiled.

Probably every planter of the day—certainly every experienced and sensible one—knew a little African himself. He could hardly help picking it up, hearing it as he did in discourse and song in the cane-piece and between the coffee-bushes. Many a planter before-time could have compiled a very creditable Kongo or K'romanty dictionary had he not been up to the eyebrows in the manufacture of black sugar and the distillation of most excellent and cordial Rumbullion.

The African Slave Trade was abolished in 1807. It was prohibitory thereafter to import a single Negro from Africa. Africa as a source for labour in the West Indies was abruptly cut off. The labour-supply in the West Indies thereafter had to be self-contained. The African languages in the West Indies had to become self-contained also. What vitality the language had, had to be found within the colony of Blacks on American soil. The periodic revivifying stream from West Africa itself was hermetically sealed.

No doubt for many years much genuine African—the natural and hereditary and idiomatic talk of the black man—was heard in gully and on mountain peak in the Caribbees. An African traveller, finding himself in a rural part of British Guiana—listening to the tap of a goatskin drum and hearing the familiar song of Negroland—might readily imagine himself in Kongo or Senna Gambia. Particularly would the African dialects come to their own, and blossom abundantly, on such occasions as Christmas and Crop-over. Then would the old Negroes get together to sing “A-we Country.” Then would be heard again the old songs of the African bush,—the true poetry and romance and tragedy of Negroland. The old heads would “pull 'Nansi story,”—not in Bakra tongue where the thing loses half its sweetness, but in the natural dialect of the tale,—Buru 'Nansi's own, own native language.

With the decay of the native Africans—the true-black Salt Waters—would come a set-back to the African dialects. No

more "Salt Waters" were imported—were allowed to be imported—to take their place. As the Old Guard died out the Creole Negro filled the gaps. On August 1, 1838, when the Negroes in British Guiana got their full freedom, of eighty-five thousand emancipated Slaves hardly thirty per cent. were African born.

It is not to be supposed that the Creole Negro knew nothing at all of one or other of the dialects of West or Central Africa. He had not rubbed shoulders with the African and joined in his merry-makings for nothing. Many a Creole Negro, no doubt, spoke African well. Probably all could understand it, more or less connectedly when they heard it. But the Creole Negro was not particularly keen to keep up the African dialects as a rule. The younger Negro, —the buck, the gentleman who told 'Monk' Lewis that he liked to look "eerie"—rather despised the jargon of the old people. He wanted to talk after the Bakra. He was in Bakra country now,—he had cut connection with Africa,—and the Bakra tongue was the tongue for him.

One may imagine that the true-born Barbadian Negro,—even when there were many Africans alive in that island,—shut his ear resolutely to the African jargon heard when the old Salt Waters beat the drum and danced Kumfu in the British historic precincts of Indian River or the Hole.

One last touch with Africa was had during the '40's of last century chiefly when there were brought to British Guiana—as also to Jamaica, Trinidad, &c.—to supplement the diminished labour supply several thousands of Liberated Africans. Upwards of thirteen thousand Africans were brought to British Guiana between 1838 and 1865. According to the Census Commissioner 706 native Africans were alive in British Guiana on April 2, 1911. They were the remnant of the Liberated Africans.

They are the final custodians of the African dialects in the Colony. Two languages they keep up,—Yoruba in one or other of its variants, and Kongo. These dialects they speak readily and commonly among themselves, and with but little corruption if one may judge by a comparison with the Dictionaries of Crowther and Bentley. Their "children"—full-grown men and women with children of their own, known as African Creoles—talk African or a

broken African too. Some of them speak it perfectly. They have "put their head to it" as they say. Others speak it brokenly. All of them can follow it more or less,—if it is only to pick out a word,—"one-one."

Are they keeping it up? The answer is, No. A few take a pride in the way they talk Yoruba or Kongo. If they were to go to Kongo-land or the Yoruba country to-morrow they would find themselves—lingually—quite at home. Others pride themselves—foolishly—that they know no African at all. They cannot talk it; they cannot "hear" (understand) it when spoken. They have not "put their head to it." Those are the African Creoles,—the immediate children of the Africans.

When we come to their children—Africans by second remove—the hold on the mother tongue is weaker still. Very few of the grandchildren know anything at all of African. They do not hear African spoken in their homes as their parents did. They hear a word now and again from their grandparents if they are alive, and if they visit them, but they do not remember it and (as they say very honestly) do not want to. African (as one of them said) was all very well for the old days—for dark benighted times. Things are changed now: English is the standard language, English is the King's language: and as subjects of King George V. and not of an African Potentate, it is English they must talk and not African.

In twenty-five years, probably, not a word of African will be spoken consciously in British Guiana. Not a word of it is spoken in Barbados now.

There may remain however—quite unconsciously as far as the speakers are concerned—some little shreds and vestiges, in word and idiom, that may connect the black people with Africa and that may be an echo of the dead tongue.

AFRICAN TRAITS IN NEGRO ENGLISH.

AMONG the black people in British Guiana the majority know no African. They have adopted English as the mother tongue. It is interesting nevertheless to find that a few genuine African words persist.

Anansi is the prime figure in the folk tales of the old people. It is delightful to hear an old man, or one of the old type of black nurse, tell a 'Nansi Story. You cannot put a 'Nansi Story on paper ; it must be heard. The voice alone can give the changes of tone, the imitations of the animals, the klick, the telling pause which sends all of the hearers into bursts of laughter. *Anansi* is the spider in the Fanti tongue ; and is the embodiment of unscrupulous cunning, which sometimes gets "left." In "Wit and Wisdom of West Africa" Burton says:—"Ananse is a kind of arachnida; amongst the Ga people a mythic personage, generally called 'Agya Ananse' or Father Spider. The people are rich in Anansisem or Spider Stories."

Ba-kara (shortened now, except by the very old people, to *Bakra*), meaning white man, is heard commonly. The word is from the Bantu or semi-Bantu languages of the Cross River and Western Kameruns. Its singular form, *Mu-kara*, has disappeared, if it were ever used. *Ba-kara* came to the West-Indies very early. In an old book on Barbados—"Great Newes from the Barbadoes" (1676)—a Negro is reported as saying he would have no hand in killing "the Baccararoes or White Folks." Another Barbados volume in black letter notes:—"Bacchararo's : so the Negro's in their Language call the Whites".

Fu-fu—in Demerara—is green plantain pounded in a mortar, and eaten with soup, usually okra or kalalu. The fu-fu, the okra, the kalalu is typical Africa. The method of pounding—namely, with a long mortar-stick which enables the woman to stand up—is typical Africa too. *Fu-fu* is an African word. *Fu* is white in the Yoruba tongue ; *fu-fu* white-white—the substance which is white-white. This derivation struck me as most improbable, seeing that pounded plantain is not white but yellow. And then an "Oku old man" told me that the African *fu-fu*—the *fu-fu* he had been

used to there and continued to eat here—was made not of plantain but yam. He showed me the yam, which he grew and watched over like gold-dust in his farm. It was named *Ako-asu*. It was a genuine Aku yam. "Pound am", said the old man enthusiastically. "Ah! *Den* you s'a see *fu-fu*. W'et! W'et! (White-white)." It has been suggested that *fu-fu* is an onomatopœic word—the sound *fu-e-fu* suggesting the thud and withdrawal of the pestle from the gluey, doughy plantain in the mortar. The word in any event is from the African Mint.

A *Jumbi* locally is a ghost. It takes a brave man to walk near, much more to enter, a kirkyard at midnight; he may see Jumbies. Owls, old-witches and goat-suckers (included among the last being the "Who-are-you?") are called Jumbi-birds by the black people. This is on account usually of their uncanny cry at night. Among plants one has the jumbi-balsam, the jumbi-bubby, the jumbi-okra, the jumbi-simatœ, and the jumbi-umbrella, a species of fungus. These have some resemblance to the true balsam, okra, etc. *Zombi* in more than one of the West African dialects is a spirit of the dead.

Kalalu has been mentioned. It is a species of *Solanum*. There are many kinds; bitter gooma kalalu, caterpillar kalalu, &c. The word is African; possibly some of the plants themselves came westward in the slave-ships. In Astley's "Voyages" there is a Description of Sierra Leone two hundred years ago. "There is," says the voyager, "a Herb called Kollilu, much like Spinage and eats as well."*

Kinna is that which if eaten—or even if come in contact with remotely—will result in leprosy or some other skin disease. *Kinna* may be labba or sheep or bush-cow. It may even be a vegetable such as bitter gooma kala lu. "Man can't eat everything he see in this world," said a veteran to me warningly; "sometime he disagree with the blood." Battel in his book on Guinea (pp. 78-9) says "Kin" is the name of unlawful and prohibited meat. It is *tabu*.

*Jamaica has a vegetable called Coccoes,—evidently African. Astley in his account of the Gold Coast says:—"They cultivate a plant which they called Kakos; but the French in America Caribbi Cabbage. The leaf is big and shaped like a heart. The roots are large and tart to the taste. They use this root instead of yams although it is not palatable, and neglect the leaves which are good as broth."

Konki is a preparation of boiled cornmeal flavoured with pumpkin, a few currants, sugar and black pepper, and wrapped hot in a plantain leaf. Astley—"Voyage to Guinea and Benin" (11. 409)—mentions "boiled Konkis to serve for bread."

Kra-kra is a skin trouble, usually on the head. There is a Creole proverb, the shrewd application of which is obvious :—"Pickny head hab kra-kra he no want am fo' comb." In Skertchley's Dahomey Glossary *kra-kra* figures as "An irritating cutaneous disease."

Obeah—which is Negro witchcraft, and whose worst aspect was the poisonous *idea* put into the mind of the subject—has gone under to a great extent. Extraordinary cases of it crop up now and again in the newspapers. It is the most difficult of all anthropological data on which to "draw" the old Negro. Burton gives an Old Calabar proverb :—"Ubio nkpo ono, onya" (They plant Obeah for him) and adds this note :—"Ubio' means any medicine or charm put in the ground to cause sickness or death. It is manifestly the origin of the West Indian 'Obeah.' We shall be the less surprised to hear that the word has travelled so far when told by Clarkson, in his 'History of the Slave Trade,' that when the traffic was a legitimate branch of commerce as many slaves were annually exported from Bonny and the Old Calabar River as from all the rest of the West African Coast."

Putta-putta we still hear of. The old man, wishing to say how muddy the path is, puts it thus :—"Da pa' bad too bad. Too much poot-poota!" In his Dictionary of the Yoruba Language Bishop Crowther defines "Poto-poto" as "Mud, beg, mire, ooze." In that sense the word is still heard in Demerara.

Other words in use, chiefly by the old people, and which I surmise to be African or African in origin are :—

Adopi.—A little hairy creature, human in shape but with four fingers on the hand and with knees that cannot bend, which is said to live in the bush.*

* In Jamaica the Negro has the *Duppy*—a blood relation probably of the Guiana *Adopi*.

Gooby (Gubi).—A calabash with a hole in the top, used for holding water, bait for fishing, &c.

Kokobay.—Leprosy.

Kongotay.—Plantain flour.

Nyam.—To eat. Yam is the thing eaten; n'yam to eat that thing. With the old African, yam itself sometimes becomes n'yam.

Nyanga.—A dude. To play the dude. "Boy, you is a real nyanga."—"Well, no Christmas time? A might as well nyanga."

Pashuma.—Withered, diminutive. "Anything in the market?"—"Only a few pashuma eddars from the Canal."

Tobboes.—Cracks in the sole of the foot.

Among Plants :—

Abbai.—The oil-palm.

Akee.—A fruit.

Gooma.—A kind of kalalu.

Taniers or *Tannias*.—*Xanthosma sagittæfolia*.

Mammee.—The fruit: mammee-apple.

Mauby.—Its bark the base of the well-known mauby-drink.

Wangala, or *Vanglo*.—*Sesamum indicum*.

Piabba.—A medicinal weed : *Leonotis nepetifolia*.

Then there are a number of words which, because the syllable is repeated, smack of Africa.

Kabba-kabba.—Worthless, indifferent.

Kaas-kaas.—The same, in a more acute degree. Also, to tumble up, to create confusion.

Ku-ku.—Boiled cornmeal, sometimes "turned" with okras. Popular in Barbados.

Loggo-loggo.—A fresh-water fish.

Moko-moko.—The giant caladium.

Pra-pra.—To lift with the fingers; petty larceny.

Tukko-tukko.—Very small. Beggar (disappointed) :—"He bring these few tukko-tukko plantains, gi'e me."

Waw-waw.—In poor health. "How you feel?"—"Waw-waw." Such are the African words, actual or apparent, unadulterated or suffering from "phonetic decay," that still come pat to the lips of the black people, and chiefly the old

black people, of British Guiana.* There remains to be considered the question, do any African traits (unconsciously) persist in the talk of the American Negro?

In "The Lighter Side of Irish Life", Mr. Birmingham says:— "Many of the peculiar turns of Irish speech are the result of thinking in one language and speaking in another. . . . He is simply translating a Gaelic idiom into English". Does one find any like transference of idiom from one language to another in Negro English? A few instances of apparent transference may be noted. They are suggestive at least.

1. In many West African languages but little distinction is made between masculine and feminine gender. In some—Mende, Ibo, Yoruba—there is no distinction at all. One notices this in the English of the old Negro. A man said:—"My sister dead, you know". I asked, "When did she die?" He replied, "He dead last week". Very commonly among the old people, a woman is referred to as "He."

* Mr. Walter Jekyll, editor of "Jamaican Song and Story" (Folk-Lore Society: 1907), gives some words used in Jamaica which appear to be African:—

Afu or hahfu.—A kind of yam.

Badu.—Root of wild coco (tannia)

Bammy.—Thick cassava cake.

Bankra.—Hand-basket with cover.

Bungo.—A black African; generally as a term of reproach.

Buzzoo.—A very small shell-fish found in rivers.

Buzzoo-yahko.—A side-bag, slung with strap round neck; haversack.

Cuttacoo.—Another name for same.

Duckanu.—A dish made with grated sweet potato, sugar and flour, baked.

Gungu.—A kind of pea.

Jonga.—A small crayfish or freshwater shrimp.

Junjo.—White toadstools (edible) growing on decayed wood.

Kekrikè.—Hoop covered with bark, and hung up (by three strings) over fire, for smoking meat.

Massu.—Lift up.

Majoe.—Small crayfish or freshwater shrimp.

Moussa.—"Turned" corn-meal, i.e., cornmeal heated with water into a thick mass like peas-pudding.

Patta.—A rough dresser for kitchen utensils.

Pattu.—A small brown owl.

Mr. Jekyll adds:—"All these words are in universal use except Badu, Buzzoo-yahko, and Majoe which belong to particular districts."

In West Africa too inanimate things are made animate. "It" becomes "He". One notices this in Demerara. "But wha' wrong wi' dis cart? He gi'in me a wash a trouble". Cook (wrathfully):—"But dis wood proppa green! He gi'in out a load a smoke".

2. In "The Lower Niger and its Tribes", Major Leonard says:—"Sometimes the plural is indicated by the adjective alone, as 'eti me' a good gift, 'uti me' good gifts". This is not uncommon with us. "How many cows are there in the pasture?—T'ree cow". The noun does not change. It would be a sort of tautology if it did. The plural is indicated by the adjective. "I see the cow" means I saw a cow. "I see the cow them" means (obviously) I saw more than one cow. "Cow" remains unaltered.

3. I quote Major Leonard again. "There are no articles; the indefinite is often expressed by the numeral 'one'". One notices this here. "I meet one man on the road, ax fo' you;" "I see one pig a root up the tannia". The speaker has no desire to emphasize that he met one man or saw one pig, and no more. "One" is simply "a."

4. Major Leonard: "Degrees of comparison are usually expressed by repetition of the word." This is true of Black Talk in Demerara. The word "very" does not exist. "Quow"—the late Mr. McTurk—catches this trait very well in his "Fables in the Negro Vernacular of British Guiana." The Fables abound in such phrases as:—"So hebby hebby rain a fall"; "Channin Clo'pon top da high high tree"; "Cronah ta'k some lang lang tory to da jury."

5. Sometimes on the contrary, as Major Leonard notes, repetition of a word signifies the diminutive. It does so in Demerara very occasionally. A fine-fine plantain is not a big plantain, but a particularly small one.

6. Mr. F. W. H. Migeod—in "The Languages of West Africa"—says:—"Yoruba is a language that seems almost all vowels to listen to." Vowels predominate in the African languages. The old Negro in British Guiana is fond of his vowel. He will end a word with a vowel if he possibly can. He manages this in either of two ways:—

(a) He drops the final consonant. Harbour becomes harba; path, becomes pa', etc., or

(b) He adds a vowel. Far becomes farra ; hear, hearie ; little, lillie ; look, lookoo ; rat, ratta.

Mr. E. A. V. Abraham gives the following as a sample of the broken English spoken by an African on the West Coast of Berbice :—

“Man, a kuma sittimba—molabetta dana lalaway.” Literally this is “Man, I come (by the) steamer, (which is) more better than (the) railway.”

The superabundance of vowels—as well as two other African traits : difficulty with the letter *R*. and a remarkable faculty for Ellipsis—is here notable.

Notes on the subject of Ellipsis, and on the subject of Gesture—typical Africa both—will be found later on.

Apropos of the use of English in general by the Negro Mr. Migeod says :

“If the words alone were taken for study, it might be assumed that the possessors of this language were a white race of Anglo-Saxon stock. When it is found that the idioms and syntax and also some of the grammatical forms are those of the black race of Africa”—and that words are altered in a characteristically African way, one may add—“the difference of race, and that they are negroes, becomes at once apparent.”

HOW THE LATER NEGRO PICKED UP HIS ENGLISH.

IN the advertisements of runaways in the Slave Time note is often made of whether the runaway could speak English well, brokenly or not at all. The runaway, unless he took to the bush, could hardly exist without talking ; and the manner of his speech was a clue to his identity.

In the yellow files of the "Royal Gazette" one finds the following Notices :—

Absconded. A Negro man of the Mandingo nation, of a black skin, speaks good English.

Runaway. A Negro man of the Mandingo nation, about 40 years in appearance, speaks English very indifferently although upwards of three years in the colony, well-known about town as a wood and grass-cutter.

Runaway. A Negro named Tom, elderly, speaks very thick.

Strayed. A tall Negro man of the Mandingo nation who speaks no English, having been only two months in the colony.

Barbados, of course, must appear in these advertisements.

Runaway. A Negro woman brought up in Barbados. Her tongue may be easily found out.

Absconded. On Monday morning, the Negro man John, a taylor, had on a black willow hat, green coatee, white trowsers and shoes ; speaks good English, with the twang common to the natives of the Islands.

Assuming that John, who was somewhat of a buck, persisted in his black willow hat and green coatee as he could not but persist in the "twang common to natives of the Islands" it is probable he did not remain at large long. The trouble is that those who would be likely to aid so great a man would hardly see the newspaper advertisement nor have been able in any way to understand it if they had.

The first Negro—the primitive Salt Water who landed at the Indian Bridge at Barbados, and was the first of his race to set foot on South American soil—picked up his English from the Englishman himself.

The later Negro—the (slightly) more sophisticated Black who stepped ashore on Demerara putta-putta a hundred or a hundred and fifty years afterwards—picked up his English at second-hand and a little damaged in the handling, from his fellow Blacks who had been long enough in the country to learn Bakra talk.

The new Negro was put with an old Creole, as a general rule ; and it was the business of the old Creole to take him in hand as the Drill Sergeant breaks in and brushes up the new recruit. The new recruit had to be taught to “break shovel ;” his previous field implement had been the fork-stick. An important part of the instruction given was a rough working knowledge of the English language. A Demerara planter said they had to teach the Negroes not only how to work but how to talk. I asked an old African once, did he know any English when he came to Demerara ?

“Engreesh ! Whi’ side me go l’arn um ?”

“You know no English at all when you come to Bakra country ?”

“’T all ’t all !”

“Who teach you when you come ?”

“Who l’arn me ? Eh-eh ! No me matty ?”

“How he learn you ? Gi’e you book and so ?”

“Book ! Youse’f too ! A-we nation got book ? Fo’ a-we book *yah* !” He touched his chest, where the Negro “mind” is supposed to reside ; his memory was his book.

“What fashion you learn ?”

“Da Uncle me a lib wit’ he se’f l’arn me. Uncle a say, ‘Bwoy, tekky this crabash (calabash)’—de crabash dey a he hand—‘go dip watah. *Watah—watah* da t’ing inside da barrel O.’ So Uncle do, sotay me a ketch wan-wan Engreesh.”

“So all of you catch Bakra talk, little by little ?”

“Ah ! Same thing ! Matty a l’arn matty, matty a l’arn matty. You no see da fashion pickny a l’arn fo’ talk—when he papa a talk he a watch he papa mout’ ? Be’y well.”

An African woman of the Ondo nation told of how she picked up the tongue of the white man upon coming to British Guiana, a liberated African, in the ‘40’s of last century. She came from Africa a girl *so high*—indicating

about four feet from the ground,—and was taken as a house girl by a family in New Amsterdam.

For two weeks Jane uttered hardly a sound. The missy said :—" Li'l gal, you' a dummy ? "

(" Me no mo' a look dem ")

" Li'l gal, you loss you' tongue ? "

(" Me too a look dem ")

At last one day the massa saw an " Oku " (Yoruba) man passing and he called him in to see whether Jane would talk.

" Did you talk ? " I asked.

" Aow ! No me country ! "

Jane and the Oku man had a long pow-wow in Yoruba, and the white children were delighted to hear them although they did not understand.

Jane was no fool although her face had barbarous-looking marks. Word by word—chair, table, water, house, cloth—she began to " ketch " English.

One day the missy called Isabella, another servant, and Jane, going the door-mouth, yelled " Isabella ! Isabella ! "

" Ma'am, " said Isabella. " Who da ? "

" Isabella ! " repeated Jane firmly.

Then the children ran out, and when they found Jane had called Isabella they took her in to the missy who told her she had done well indeed.

One night, there being company at dinner, Jane was called in to let them all see how well she had got on.

" Who this ? " asked the massa, pointing to his wife.

" Missee "

" And who this ? " (himself)

" Massa. "

" And this ? "

" Miss Cat'rine. "

" This one now ? " (another servant).

" Winky. "

" Good ! Good ! Jane learning English. "

They were all much pleased, and drank to African Jane in shrub. The massa gave Jane a little shrub too and she drank it, made a scrape-foot and left the room.

She recalls one amusing incident.

The missy was sick, and Jane, who had picked up a few phrases, went to the "doctor-shop."

"How is the missy to-day?" asked the druggist.

"Very well," said Jane, and then—recollecting another good phrase—"Half-and-half."

It was not so hard for the young African to pick up English, although certain words and double-consonants would be found to defy his ear for a long time and his tongue for ever. The difficulty was with the adult people. The planter liked to get his "Salt Waters" young.

But, planter, from what coast so e'er they sail,

Buy not the old; they ever sullen prove;

With heartfelt anguish they lament their home;

They will not, cannot work; they never learn

Thy native language.

Thus sings—or says—Dr. James Grainger in "The Sugar Cane" (1764).

With the dawn of Freedom on August 1, 1838, the Bible did much to perpetuate old English forms of speech, and to encourage the use of imagery and metaphor in the current talk of the Negroes in the West Indies. The Bible was closely associated with Emancipation. In slave times it had been a closed book; it was only with the coming of Freedom that it was at all generally taught. Practically the only teacher the Negro had was the missionary; his only book the Bible or a tract based on the Old or New Testament.* The freed men and women of the 1st of August had one desire only when they thronged the rude schools of

*Seven books were found in the hut of a runaway Negro:—

1 hymn book (Watt's)

1 " " (Wesley's)

1 Spelling Book

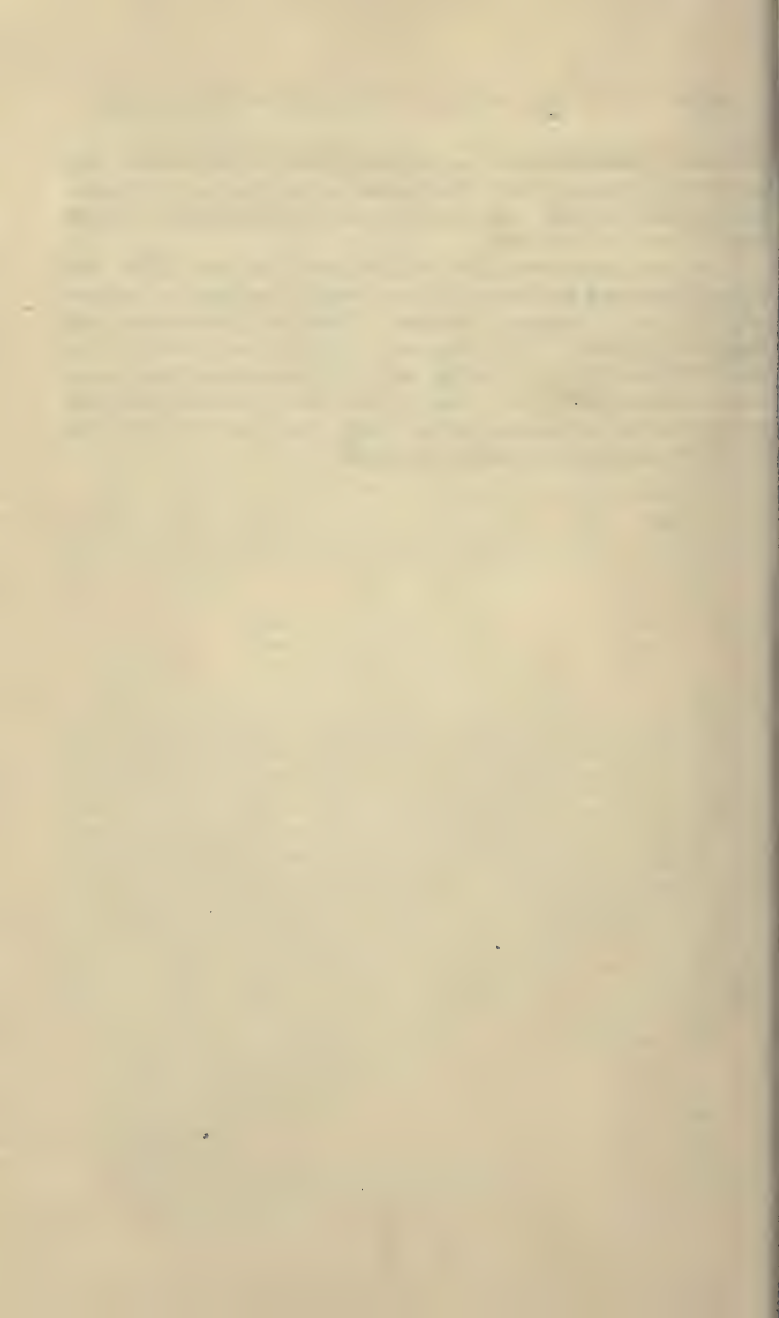
2 Bibles

1 Testament.

Bryant, "Account of an Insurrection of the Negro Slaves in Demerara in 1823" (86).

the time—and that was to read the Bible. One knows two or three old people now who cannot write a word, who cannot sign their names, but who can read the Bible and who do read it and nothing else.

It is not surprising that the language of the Bible has taken deep root in their minds nor that it springs up naturally in the talk of such people. With the unfamiliar text they are familiar. They can quote chapter and verse. Undoubtedly to this fact—to the way Bible language has saturated their minds—is it due in part that words and word-senses survive in the talk of the black people which in the world at large have “gone retrograde.”



PHRASE AND WORD NOTES.

A (AH).

At.

"Where does he live?"—"He live a Mahaica."

Have.

"I would a come."

I.

"How do you like it?"—"A like it well."

Cf.—Westmoreland: "A cannot reetly tell ya."

Yorkshire: "A wish 'a'd been there."

In.

"She put money a minista hand."

Of.

"Gi'e me piece a plantain."

Cf.—Devon: "Let's drink drap a ale."

That.

"'A' man watch me steady."

"'A' true, boss, 'a' true." (Literally: that is true, boss, that is true)

"A DEY."

I am there.

"Well, old man, how are you?"—"A dey."

One gathers that the old man is there but no more; he is sticking together.

I know an old African woman—inhabiting a troolie hut—whom I usually meet sunning herself "a door-mout'."

"Well, old lady, how are you?"—"Aow!" She points upwards.
"Me dey 'pon am."

ABACK.

The back lands of a plantation, cattle-farm or village.—“Boy, where is the boss?”—“He gone aback.”

The term occurs in Scotland.—

The third, that gaed a wee aback,
Was in the fashion shining,
Fu' gay that day.—Burns *Holy Fair*.

ABLE.

Able for, fit to cope with.

Old gentleman (on the West Coast of Berbice):—“Mosquita ! Sah !
Me no able wi' dem mosquita !”

Woman (to neighbour):—“Ma'am, Art'a too bad. Me no able wid he.”

ADJECTIVE, USE OF

(a) As a noun.

Old man (referring to Emancipation Day):—“Was August mont' when Free fall.” (when Freedom came.)

Woman (suspicious herself):—“Well, a ent know wha' name suspicious.”

Beggar:—“Hungry ! Talk 'bout hungry ! Is me can tell you wha' call hungry.”

Balata Bleeder (describing adventures in the bush):—“A tell you. chap, dead want hold me in da place.”

(b) As a verb.

“A gwine hang dese plantains hey fo' yalla.” (to become yellow)

“A dunno wha' kind a sick (sickness) he got ”

Of a middle-aged man:—“He just begin fo' grey.” (to turn grey)

Woman (quickly, to child):—“Don't handle da bush ; he does nasty people hand.”

AGE.

The old Negro has no "birthday"; he cannot tell his age. He is as old as he looks. White head, fewness or absence of teeth, wrinkled face, general bodily frailty: that, and the people and incidents he can remember, enables one to judge within five or ten years of the time he has been upon this mortal world.

An elderly man is "ageable".

Of an old man it is said, "Old take place," or "Old age take place,"

When one is "properly, properly old", it is said that he is "old, done."

ALL-TWO.

Both.

"Which mango did the boy take?"—"All two."

AM (OR UM.)

He, she, or (more commonly) it or them.

"Did you meet Kudjo?"—"Me meet am."

"Did you bring the plantains?"—"Yes, sah. Me put am a bottom-house."

Cf.—Yorkshire—"Ah wodn't bother wi' um."

AND ALL.

And everything, *et cetera*.

"Well, they laugh (at) she well. But she and all was laughing!"

In general dialect use in Great Britain and Ireland.

Cf.—Yorkshire—"Ah's going an' all."

A PLENTY.

Many, several, *much*

"A plenty people been there."

"Ow, I too sorry when I hear Benjie dead. I cry a plenty."

Cf.—Somerset—"No more this time o' zittin down, thankee, I've had a plenty."

AUNTY.

A term of respect for an old woman. Relationship is not necessarily implied.

"Morning, me child"—"Morning, Auntie!"

"Whose hen is this?"—"Auntie Molsey y'own."

Cf.—Somerset—"Poor old aunt Jenny Baker's a tookt bad."

AX.

Ask. O.E. *acsian* (*axian*), to ask.

An archaism.

The word occurs in Wycliffe's Bible (1388):—"Whanne he schal *axe*, what schal y answeere to hym?" (Job xxxi. 14). It is in general dialect use in Great Britain.

Cf.—"I was only axin what was in it." Barlow. *Lisconnel*.

BAD.

Ill, sick, in pain.

"Child how?"—"Gal, a feeling too bad."

If anything is wrong with a limb, one has a "bad arm," a "bad toe," a "bad leg," &c.

Cf.—Antrim, Ireland:—"A wus very bad."

BADLY.

See *Bad*.

"I saw Sarah to-day. But you know she really lookin' badly!"

Cf.—Nottinghamshire:—"Are yer badly, lass?"

"Badly" by some is regarded as a better word than "bad"; the common folk feel "bad," the better sort "badly."

BECAUSIN.

Because.

"Beausin' he say so, make I hit he." Shortened, frequently, to 'kaasin.

BEDA.

Friend, twin-spirit.

A term used by a woman of, or to, a woman. "She is my beda."

BE-OUT.

Without.

"Eh-eh ! I sure ! De ball can't go on be-out you ?"

Cf.—Staffordshire—"Wot didst gu biait mee fer ?"

BEVERAGE.

Sugar-water, or similar non-alcoholic brew.

Tired workman—"A will t'ank you fo' li'l bebridge."

Cf.—Durham—"Beberish."

BIG-ABLE.

Commonly used.

E.g., a big-able man, a big-able house, a big-able dinner.

BLACK-LEAD.

A black-lead pencil.

"Lend me a black-lead."

BLOW.

Breathe.

"Do ! Gi'e me chance fo' blow."

Cf.—Yorkshire—"A've run till a can hardly blow."

BODY.

Individual, person.

"But look ! A is de wrong body fo' play wit'."

"Do you know the man ?"—"No, sah, a ent know de body."

BRACKISH.

Convalescent, half-and-half.

"Well, old man, how are you?"—"Well, sir,—li'l' brackish."

[Water is brackish when it is half fresh and half salt, neither one thing nor the other, half-and-half.]

BRAGGA.

Braggart, braggadocio.

"But look this boy! He too bragga!"

Of one of a "high stomach"—"He playin' (or making) too much bragga."

BREAK.

Communicate.

"As me hear am so me break am, gi'e you."

Cf :—"Break the news."

Interrupt.

"I no break 'pon you, sah, but—"

BRUX.

An affront, a snub.

"I meet with a bad brux."

BUDDY.

A friendly term, not necessarily implying relationship.

"Benjie! How?"—"Me dey, buddy."

Man is a gregarious animal; and black man strikingly so.

BUNG.

To stop up, stopt up.

Friend, to gay spark (the morning after the night before) :—" Goodness gracious ! What do you ? You got a bung-eye."

Cf.—Yorkshire—" His eyes are bunged up wi' cold."

'BUSE.

"Quashiba"—it is usually the lady—has a "bitter tongue." Fifty per cent. of the Police Court cases arise out of abuse—"she 'buse me, sah." A slight monetary loss, however, is thought to be quite worth while if the defendant (arms akimbo) can relate :—"Ma'am ! I gi'e she a good 'busing off."

BY.

Because:

"By I see the fella I knew was something up."

"By you say you was coming, I stay home."

CARRY.

To take.

"You going to Berbice ? Car' me, no ?"

CHAM.

To bite, to chew.

Rare. African woman :—"No, massa, you no fo' swaller um so. You must cham um first."

Cf.—Cheshire—"I've gien that chap summut to chom ennyhow."

CHOCK.

Right up to.

He walk chock a Mahaica."

COARSE.

Large.

Hawker :—"Get you coa'se green peas !"

COLD.

To cool, to get cold.

"Leh de chocolate stand hey, in de wind, fo' cold."

"Hot" is similarly used for the verb to heat.

"I gwine put this fo' hot on the fire."

CORNER.

Beside, close to.

"Come boy, sit caana me."

"Where is the cutlass?"—"Look, you s'a fin' am caana de coconut (tree)."

COUPLE.

A few.—"A gi'e he couple kick."

"Is the plum tree bearing well?"—"Well, not to say bearing well. But he got couple plum."

CUFF.

To knock, to box : a box.

"Boy ! If you do dat t'ing again I gwine cuff you *in* de head."

"You wait ! A gwine gi'e he a solid cuff."

CUT.

To talk.

"Dem people, sah ! Dem a cut Kongo (talk the Kongo language) fo' true."

Halliwell quotes this as an archaic word-sense in England,—to say, to speak.

CUTLASH.

Cutlass.

"So long I has my cutlash I is all right."

Cf.—"Of two his cutlash launch'd the spouting blood."—Pope, *Odyssey*. XIV, 87.

DAM.

Road or street.

The word carries us back to early Guiana.

A mud dam was the only possible road in the coast swamp,—a highway indeed. The word is still commonly applied to the city streets.

"Wha' wrong?"—"Nuttin. A man and a 'oman a fight 'pon de dam."

Irate mother:—"Peta, wha' wrong wi' you at all? You can't stay in the yard! You must be always runnin', runnin', 'pon de dam."

DAY CLEAN.

Just before sunrise.

"I does get up, wash me mout' and say me pray's befo' day clean."

DEATH.

"A dead" is a dead person.

"A gwine bury a dead."

"Who are you in mourning for?"—"You no hear? A had a dead."

The old-time Negroes are stated to be (as in fact they are) "deading out."

As for the old people who "saw Slavery":—"Sca'ce wan a dem dey-dey now. They dead out."

DIRT : DIRTY.

Earth.

Driver: "Now look. A you mus' ram dis dirty good, yeh."

It is suggested that the word may be derived from "earthy," which to the old Negro who found difficulty in pronouncing *th*, would become *ear'ty*. The surmise is plausible, anyway.

DISCOURSE.

Talk, conversation.

"Me an' the man was discoursin'."

A sermon is often a "discourse."

Cf.—Ireland—"She was out with the childer, discoursin' to Terence Kilfoyl."—Barlow, *Lisconnel*.*

DISTANCE.

Before-time—when rivers and creeks were the high-roads and lanes of Guiana—distance on a tidal waterway was expressed thus:—"Two tides distant," or "A tide and a half away."

With bridle-paths and bush tracks, a place was distant a day or an hour, according to the time it took to ride or walk there.

Even now—when the milestone shows itself at regular intervals on the parapet—the old people can seldom grip the idea of mileage. Ask a veteran on a country road how far it is to such-and-such a place and he will tell you, "Not too far." or (if distant) "He well far," or (if very distant) "He f-a-r, f-a-r," or "He far-far-far." "A li'l ways" may be anything from half-a mile to two miles and a half; "a good li'l ways," yet further.

DOCTOR MEDICINE: DOCTOR SHOP.

"Doctor medicine" is physic prescribed by a doctor, or from the drug-store, as distinct from "bush medicine," the primitive remedy of the "weed woman." The West Indies abound with weeds and grasses, roots and bushes used by the black people (the older generation especially), sometimes with beneficial results.

The drug shop is the "doctor-shop"—

"Boy, run to Scott doctor-shop, quick, fo' dis medicine."

Do.

Ails.

Woman (to sobbing boy):—"Boy, what do you?"

Also used elliptically for "if you do."

"Don't go near that trench, do, you'll fall in."

* Mr. J. Van Sertima in "The Creole Tongue of British Guiana" [New Amsterdam: 1905], quotes a parallel taken from Shakespeare. Mr. Van Sertima's book abounds in parallels to Negro dialect found in Shakespeare's works. Many of them are exact and most striking.

DO FOR.

Two very opposite meanings.

(a) To harm, to injure, (in old days) to set Obeah.

Woman :—" You hear ! O you hear ! You hear wha' da woman say, she gwine do for me !"

(b) To take care of, to provide for.

Woman :—" A'right. Done. Neva mind. I gwine do for you."

Cf. Surrey.—" I can't justly remember whether I ast her fust or she ast me, but I know one day I says ' Will you do for me ? ' and she says, ' Yes', and then I says, ' Will you do for me allus ? ' and she says ' Yes' and so we got marr'd."

DONE.

Cease, be quiet.

Man (to another, much upset) :—" Done, man, done !"

Finis.

" I eat it, done."

DOOR-MOUTH.

The opening for the door.

" Come in, no ? Sit down. No stan' up a (in the) door-mout'."

EASY.

Softly, quietly.

Old man (with lifted hand) :—" ' Bush got ears.' Talk easy."

" Don't hurry yourself, old man."—" No sah. Me gwine walk easy, go."

EH-EH.

Black Talk unadulterated. Characteristically, the ejaculation " Eh ! " is duplicated, and becomes " Eh-eh ! "

" Eh-eh " may express surprise, delight, indignation, horror. It conveys when heard the precise mental attitude of the speaker. It is one of the several traits of Negro dialect impossible to pin to paper.

Man :—" Gally, me uncle dead. Telegram just come."

Woman (hand over mouth) :—" **Eh-e-h !**"

Man :—(angrily) :—" Well, if it ent please you, you can clear out !"

Woman (sharply) :—" Eh-eh ! Look, no bring you' eye-pass to me."

EH-HEH.

“Eh-heh?” (voice rising) implies a question, as if to say, “Is that so?”

“Eh-heh” (voice falling) signifies assent.

ENOUGH.

Implies quantity, quality, &c., to the full.

“Was a great ball, yes, great and great enough.”

“How are things with you?”—“Bad and bad enough.”

’Nuff-’nuff is plenty-plenty.

EVERYTHING.

Exactly in all respects.

Woman (surveying lad) :—“Goodness! But this boy *ev-ery-thing* like he father!”

EVER SINCE.

A long time ago.

“How long have you been here?”—“Ever since.”

EXPRESSION.

A curse, an oath.

“What did the man tell you?”—“Sah, de expression da man use. me shame fo’ call am.”

A peculiarly bad curse, or bit of abuse, is known as a “bad expression.”

In Worcester, “expression” means coarse language.

EYE.

Many phrases are connected with the eye.

"Big eye" typifies gluttony.

To play or make, "strong eye" is to play a bold game.

"Eye-turn" is giddiness.

When a person, beast or thing, fully satisfies you it is said to "full your eye"; when it doesn't, "This t'ing no full me eye at all."

When you are sleepy, "Sleep a full me yeye"; when your eyesight is failing, "Me yeye a get li'l da'k."

To "cut your eye" at anybody is to look askance at him.

"Don't bring your eye-pass to me," says the veteran to the bumptious young man. "No make you' eye pass me."

FAMILY.

Relation, relative.

"He is any family to you?"

FAVOUR.

To be alike (usually) in features or countenance.

"But this boy really favour you."

In general dialect use in Great Britain.

Galloway.—"It'll be your faither that you favour."—Crockett, *Sunbonnet*.

Cumberland.—"He favours his father, does Ralph."—Caine, *Shad. Crime*.

FAWFI-EYED.

Squint-eyed, cock-eyed.

"You see Mister Benjamin?"—"A ent know he. You mean a sho't ol' man wi' a fawfi eye?"

FEW.

A few.

"The man must have nearly killed you, no?" "Kill! *He*! No. He gave me few blows very well."

FIGHT.

An effort, a struggle, difficult work.

"Well, Sarah,—how?"—"Oh, chile, fightin' wi' de times."

"Well, old man, how are you getting on with the garden?"—"A fighting wi' dis cherry hedge."

Cf. Scotland :—"It was a sair fecht on the road hame."

FO' TRUE.

An affirmation, or (more usually) a question, meaning "Truly," or "Is that true?"

Friend (to gold-digger):—"Hi, chap, you nyanga fo' true!"

"Bosey married, you know?"—"Fo' true?"

Fo'

An elliptical form of "for to," in common use.

"The house is in bad order."—"Eh-eh. Bat an' spider no take am over. Wha' you expec' fo' find?"

Cf.—"But what went ye out for to see?"—Matthew xi, 8.

FOREDAY-MORNING.

About 3 or 4 a.m.

The Anglo-Saxons had the word "farendaeg," before break of day.

The Negro says "foreday morning." The redundancy is characteristic.

"When do you start for the market?"—"Fo'eday ma'nin'."

FRESH-COLD.

Sun-cold, a cold in the head.

"Well, child,—how?"—"Me dear, a ent feel well at all, a got a fresh-cold."

FRICTION.

Match.

"You got a friction 'bout you?"

FRIKEN.

Frighten.

"Pay? Oh yes, I will pay. No friken."

"The t'ing had me friken."

FULL.

To fill.

"Full the mug, no."

One notes such phrases as these:—"The moon will be fulling Tuesday" (it will be full moon on Tuesday). "The mango want two week mo' fo' full" (to be mature).

GI'E.

Give.

"G'ie me de t'ing no"!—"G'ie you! No ma'am. I ent gi'in' you."

Cf.—Berkshire—"Zo we'll gee un a scrape." Hughes. *Scour. White Horse.*

Devon—"He'll gie thee a clout over ear vor biden up zo late."

GOOD.

Well.

"Well, uncle, how are you feeling?"—"Oh, sah, a ent feelin' too good." This has no reference to his morals—about whose happy state my friend is of an astonishing certitude—but to his health physically.

[A variant of this is "nice." Messenger (a little out of sorts): "I don't feel nice to-day."]

GOODLY.
—

Good.

But wha' do the goodly gentleman ? "

HARD-EARED.
—

Pig-headed, obstinate.

" But boy, wha' make you so ha'd-ears ? "

With elderly people it is a chronic complaint that the " young generation them " are " hard-aize."

HEAR.
—

To heed.

Irate mother :—" I tell this boy over and over, 'Mind the paling, mind the paling,' and he won't hear."

To understand.

" Do you speak the African language ? " I asked a Kongo Creole,—*i.e.*, the son of Kongo parents. " No sir," he replied. " The language too deep. My tongue can't bring it. But I can hear it a little." (He could understand a little of it when spoken by another.)

HEAVY.
—

Big, important.

" But look Charley ! He playin' a heavy nyanga."

Old man (listening to a tale of woe) :—" Buddy,—*a-h*,—dis 'tory too heavy."

HOUSE.
—

Burn-house. A house burned down.

Funeral-house. A house at which there is a funeral.

Cf.—Westmoreland : " On arriving at the funeral-house a large table was set out."

Sick-house. The old name for a hospital.

Cf.—Ireland :—

In a sick-house, damp and narrow
See Will next in pain and sorrow.

—Macneill, *Poetical Works*.

Wake-house. House at which there is a wake.

HOWDYE.

How-do-ye.

A common salutation or message from the old people :—

“Morning, old man”—“How-dye me massa.”

Old lady to passenger (at railway station) :—

“You mus’ tell dem how-dye, yeh, how-dye a plenty. Ow !
Gi’e dem *’nuff* how-dye fo’ me.”

HUMAN.

A human being.

Jane (angry at ill-treatment) :—“Look ! A is no brute-beast. A is a human.”

(?—Scotland (Aberdeenshire) :—“Gibbie fell to hugging him (a dog) as if he had been a human.” Macdonald, *Sir Gibbie*.

H-YA.

An ejaculation expressive of anger, pride, &c.

“Boy ! If you do that again, I gwine gi’e you *wan* cuff ! H-ya !”

Veteran (describing Christmas before-time, when Christmas was Christmas) :—“*Christmas* ! Me massa ! Come look me ! Lang-tail coat, beeba-hat, bow-tie.” Deep grunt. “H-ya !”

IN.

Into.

“I gwine in the field.”

Stormy mother in next yard (to Jarge, the lhard-eared) :—“I gwine beat you’ skin in the bargain.”

JUST.

As.

“Just I see the man, the bell ring.”

JUSTLY.

Exactly.

"Does Mr. Smith live here?"—"I can't justly tell."

Cf. Rutland.—"Ah doon't joostly know."

JUST NOW.

"Among Negroes in British Guiana," writes a correspondent, "'just now' means the immediate future as a rule; among Negroes in Barbados it means the immediate past."

As :

"I comin' just now" (future).

"I see he just now" (past).

KEEP.

Hold, keep up.

"Keep" a dance; "keep" a meeting.

Make, keep up.

"Boy, hush you' mout. You keeping too much noise!"

Cf. Pembroke :—"Don't you kip such a hollering."

KINDLY.

A word frequently, and with unconscious irony misplaced.

Beggar :—"Boss, a kindly ax you fo' a bitt."

LASH.

A blow.

"I hit he two lash with a stick."

"He fire a lash at me."

LATED.

Late, belated.

"A gwine out. A will (be) back by ten."—"All right then. I know you. Take care you lated!"

Among the Shirburn Ballads (1585-1616) is one. "A Pleasant Dream," in which the first line of a stanza reads :—"Cupid abroad was lated in the night."

LAY.

To lie.

"My back hu't me so bad, I can scarcely lay down."

Cf.—Lincoln.—"Lay ye down a bit, maaster."

LEARN.

To teach, instruct ; sometimes used ironically as a threat of punishment.

"I want you (to) learn this boy good."

Irate mother (leather in hand) :—"I gwine learn you sense."

In general dialect use in Great Britain and Ireland.

LIARD.

Liar.

"O my goodness, you see this girl ! She is a born liard."

"Boy, you ent shame ? Wha' make you so liard ?"

Cf.—Somerset.—"I zay you'm a liard, there now !"

LIKE.

As if.

Woman (to cook hurrying from market) :—"Like you lated ?"

To "stand like" is to resemble.

"A 'pectacle make da Backra 'tan' like night owl got sore yiye."—

MCTURK, *Fables*.

LOOK TROUBLE.

Ejaculation.

Girl (excitedly) :—"Peta been a t'row dice, ma'am. De Police got 'e ! Dey lock 'e up ! I now now from de Station."

Mother (laconically) :—"Look trouble !"

Cf.—"We looked for peace, but no good came ; and for a time of health, and behold trouble !" Jeremiah viii., 15.

MAKE.

Allow.

Anxious veteran (leaving a parcel below the back-steps) :—"Don't make de cook take dese t'ings away !"

MAKE OUT.

Manage, contrive.

"A dunno how Elizabeth will make out"

MAN.

Myself, (in an impersonal sense.)

"Now man ax fo' li'le pepper-mint drop, man can't get um."

—VAN SERTIMA, *Sketches of Demerara Life*.

"People" is used in the same way.

Boy (brushing away the mosquitoes) :—"Tcha! Mosquita a bother people."

MASH.

Used in several senses.

To tread—"My foot so bad I no able mash wid am."

To crush—"Don't mash my toe."

To break—"Boy, get down out of that. You want mash de man paling?"

To bruise, to beat. Termagant (in next yard) :—"I gwine mash you skin."

When Daddy Quashie has been sick, and comes out again, he says :
"I feel too mash up."

An estate that has been abandoned is spoken of as "mash up." Daddy Quashie (reminiscently) :—"Ah, sah, *Two Friends* ! before time ! Sugar ! Rum ! Molasses ! but now, sah,—ah—cha cha—all mash up, eb-ery-'ting mash up."

MATTY.

Pal, comrade.

"Boy, no bring dis tall chat to me. Take am to you' matty."

The term is used sometimes in allusion to inanimate things :—

"Where are these two fields—No. 4 and No. 16 ? 'Are they near each other ?"

Labourer :—"They does face matty." (They are opposite.)

MEAT.

Applied among all the Africans, and a few other of the old people, to animals living as well as dead.

Anansi Story—"Tiger make a dinner. He call labba O—deer O—acourie O—all meat."

MEET.

(1) To meet with, to light upon, to find.

Gold-digger :—"Groete creek, sir, that is the place to meet gold."

Mistress :—"Who put this calabash here?"

Maid :—"A dunno, ma'm. A meet it dey."

Cf.—Pembrokeshire :—"I met a scissors underneath the table."

(2) To arrive.

"What time you expect fo' meet at Buxton?"

META.

An equal, a match.

"Ah boy, to-day to-day you meet you' meta."

A sprig of Anglo-Saxon, apparently, transplanted and yet alive among the mangroves of South America.—*Cf.* A.S. *metan*, to measure.

MIND.

The old-time Negro is not a deep thinker. He thinks in spurts. He is a bundle of impulses; many of his conclusions are reached—or jumped to—as a result of feeling, intuition, which is brilliantly right sometimes, and hopelessly and perversely wrong rather often.

He has a good phrase himself to denote this:—"My mind gi'e me."

Bakra:—"So you are not going to plant coffee here after all?"

Farmer:—"No sah. Me mind gi'e me dis land ent gwine gi'e no good returns in coffee."

Translated, this means:—"I have not gone into it scientifically—I have not even pondered it at all—but I have a feeling—per hap

originating a thousand years ago—that land just so environed is bad for coffee, therefore I am not planting it. That's all."

To have "a mind" that something is going to happen is (again) to have a feeling, an intuition, a presentiment.

"Well! Benjie gone to the bush."—Pause—"My mind gi'e me he ent comin' back."

Cf.—"Forasmuch as his mind gave him that, his nephews living, men would not reckon that he could have right to the realm, he thought, therefore, without delay to rid them."

—Sir T. More, *History of King Richard III.*

Two good phrases are:—"A bad mind," and "a good mind." If a man has a "bad mind" it were well to avoid him like the devil. If—speaking of anyone—the old Negro remarks, "He has a good mind," he means it honestly and it is shining praise.

MISS.

Abbreviation of Mistress.

"Where you gwine?"—"I gwine at Miss Jones'."

'MOST.

Almost.

"You 'most hit me with that stone, you know."

Cf. "'Maist dead seldom helps the kirkyard."—Scottish Proverb.

MOSTLY.

For the most part, generally, usually.

"I does mostly go 'pon a Saturday."

Cf. Ayr, Scotland:—"They're maistly wonderfu' contented."

MUSICIANER.

Musician.

Impatient lady (at a ball):—"But wha' wrong at all wi' de musicianer?"

Cf. Yorkshire:—"And ax'd all the musicianers."

NAKED.

Simply ; the person or persons, article or articles mentioned, with no-one or nothing at all else.

An old man told me that fifty years ago Canal No. 1, on the West Bank of the Demerara River, had nothing but "naked Oku"; he meant that the settlers in the Canal were Oku, and nobody else.

Veterans, describing the hard times upon which they have fallen—and rest with tolerable equanimity—say that their food from one year to another is "naked plantain, no mo."

NEIGHBOUR.

A word of Biblical usage frequently in the mouths of the black people.

"Chile, a did feel too bad last night. If say wasn't fo' me neighba gi'e me couple peppermint drop a t'ink a would a did dead."

Much sympathy—not verbal alone—is expressed by neighbour to neighbour, inhabiting muddy yards and with little to bless themselves with but an elastic copper or two.

NEITHER.

No.

"No, sah. I ent got needa sweetheart. I is a 'oman does face de counter fo' everyt'ing I wear."

Van Sertima, *Sketches of Demerara Life*.

No ?

Is it not, are you not, &c.

Sometimes occurs at the beginning of a sentence.

"The mosquitoes are bad, old man"—"Eh-eh ; Dey mus' bad, sah. No rainy season ?"

More frequently, however, it is to be found at the end of the sentence. Half the questions asked in British Guiana—and not by the black people alone—take the form of an affirmation, with "No ?" tacked on at the end. *E.g.* "You coming to-morrow, no ?" "You are the boy (who) brought the parcel, no ?"

A Mud-head in London said :—"This is the Brondesbury 'bus, no ?"
A stranger said :—"It is. How are all the folk in Demerara ?" *

* For the benefit of the uninstructed it may be explained that a Mudhead is anyone born in the Land of Mud—or on the Old Mud-flat—which (up to the present) is British Guiana. The name for the Colony is not inapt. European settlers so far are just on the silt deposited by the edge of the sea. They are hardly in Guiana proper. Things are changing. A century hence British Guiana may be a great highland country with, just, a muddy front-door.

No Mo.'

That's all.

Defendant (charged with abuse) :—" I gi'e he couple words, no mo'."

Angry old lady (describing a wake) :—" Dem bwoy, sah ! Naked rum dey a look fo', no mo' "

Farmer :—" Da ramgoat mash up all dem tannia teh dem fit no mo' fo' feed hag."

Does not mean, as the stranger might infer, that the tannias were no longer fit to feed hogs, but that after being "mashed" by the goat they were fit to feed hogs, and hogs only.

No So.

Or.

Jupiter :—" Buy half a compass rum, quick."

Bosey :—" Rum, no so brandy ? "

OFF OF.

Use of the redundant "of" is common.

" I notice Richard hangin' around. Well, he ent gwine mek nuttin offa (off of) me."

If Effiba errs, she errs in good (although archaic) company. Readers of Sir Hans Sloane—" Natural History of Jamaica"—will recall the Negro-Doctor, famous for the cure of Asthma's, who made use of Misseltoe "gather'd off of Sweet-Wood and Bean or Coral-Tree Tops."

ONE.

Only.

" Me-one " is myself only ; " he-one ", he only ; " she-one ", she only ; " you-one ", you only.

" Who was in the house at the time ? "—" Me-one."

ONE-ONE.

A few, or very few.

" Are there any Africans now in Canal No. I ?"—" One-one."

If there are very few indeed—as, alas, is rapidly becoming the case—the reply would be " W-a-n, w-a-n." Prolongation of the vowel acts as an intensitive.

Allied phrases—but rarely heard—are " two-two, t'ree-t'ree."

ONLIEST.

Only.

Cook (doubtfully) :—"The onliest t'ing, Monday is a bad day fo' plantains."

Cf. Hampshire :—"That's the onliest one there."

OUT.

To extinguish, to put out.

Kudjo :—"Out the lamp, quick."

Cf. Isle of Wight :—"Out the light, wull 'ee."

OVER.

To cross over.

Anansi Story :—"And when Goat come to de creek (Goat no able fo' swim, you know) Goat say, 'Eh ! How I gwine (to) over ?'"

Man (wishing to cross a trench) :—"Dis is de shalla (shallow part). Leh we ova here."

Ow !

Ejaculation expressive of surprise, sympathy, sorrow.

By some writers it is written "Aow !" which indeed expresses the sound better when it is drawn out.

"How you' fadda, boy ?" "He dead yesterday. "You fadda dead ! Ow."

PARTLY.

Almost, nearly.

"He partly kill the man."

"He was as big as me partly."

Man :—"Me no tell you s-o, man. Me tell you," &c., &c.

Friend :—"Eh-eh ! No partly de same t'ing ?"

PEENY.

Puny.

Veteran :—"Dem peeny li'l boy an' all gi'e rudeness."

A set of the younger or smaller boys used to be called a 'peeny set'—Yorkshire, *English Dialect Dictionary*.

PIECE.

A field.

"Where did you get this Bitter Tally?"—A find it in de cane-piece. (cane-field).

"The coffee-piece is looking beautiful just now."

"The horse got into the grass-piece." (Jamaica)

Cf. West Somerset.—"In speaking of any crop on the ground, whether the whole field or only part is referred to, it is usual to say 'Thick piece o' whate,' 'Rare piece o' grass,' 'Shockin' poor piece o' turmits,' 'Thindest piece o' barley I've a-zeed de year.'"—*English Dialect Dictionary*.

PRONOUNS.

Primitive man knows but little of the pronoun. Children fail to recognize it for some time after they have learned to talk. The pronoun in Negro Dialect is changed perhaps more than any other part of speech except the verb.

I becomes *A*, or *Ah*.

We and *Us* becomes *A-we*, sometimes written *Awee*. Old Lady (lamenting the hard times):—"Po' a-we!"

You becomes *A-you* (usually in the plural). "A quisitive a-you 'quisitive make a-you always a look fo' go get trouble"—McTurk, *Fables*.

Him and *her* becomes *he* and *she*.

Rude boy.—"But look she face!"

Myself.—"Do you know her?" Cook.—"No, sir, a ent know she."

Cf.—Dorsetshire.—"I doesn't wish my zon to marry wid she."

As for the possessive case, Negro Dialect takes on a possessive quite its own.

My or *mine* becomes *me-own*.

"Whose hat is this?"—"Me-own." Or possibly, "Fo' me-own."

Or perhaps, "Is mine's."

His and *her's* becomes *he-own* and *she-own*.

"Whose bateau is this?"—"He-own."

Our or *Our's* becomes "A-we-own." The apostrophe *s* after the noun is unknown.

It is "Kudjo cow" or "Joseph farm;" and if one asks, "Whose cow is this?" the reply is "Kudjo own," or simply "Kudjo."

PROPER, PROPERLY.

Thoroughly, out-and-out.

Veteran (severely):—"Dem Creo'! (Creole boys). Sah! Dey proper mannish!"

Buyer (ejaculatory, of East Indian who has refused to take a "worn cent"):—"Suspicious! But dem Babu dis is properly suspicious."
"Properly" indeed, thinks the Bystander.

PULL FOOT.

To walk fast.

"Boy, tek dis scrip to Mr. Abraham. And pull foot, yeh!"

Cf.—Ireland.—"He's pullin' fut at a great rate."

PUNISH.

To suffer.

African old man:—"If I been a Afrukay, I no punish lika dis yah."

"Well, old lady, how are the times?"—"Tem, sah. Ow! A punishin'."

REVEREND.

A clergyman.

"Reverend, I kindly ax you fo' sign dis paper fo' me."

"Well, you fix yet fo' dis child baptize?"—"Yes, I see the Reverend yesterday."

Cf. Dorset:—"I went round to the rectory afterward, and I did thank the Reverend."

RIGHTED.

Right.

"Eh! De gen'leman say de yard wi' de star-apple! Dis can't be de righted house."

RUCTION.

Rowdy, insurrectionary.

"He's a ruction boy."

"Boy, why you so ruction?"

As a noun, in general dialect use in Great Britain.

SAY.

A redundancy.

"I hear, say, Mary comin' to town."

(Possibly there is some confusion here with "hearsay." The black people are lawyers; no doubt they are well acquainted with the term "hearsay evidence.")

"I dream, say, Bosey dead."

"He tell me, say, Benjie gone to Potaro."

"He say, say, all a dem must come."

"He isn't, say, sick, but he ent feelin' good."

"I think, say, I gwine move."

Cf.—"And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines,"—I Sam. xiii. 4.

SCARCE.

Scarcely.

"A can sca'ce walk."

Cf.—"Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father [before] Esau his brother came in from his hunting.—Genesis xxvii. 30.

SCRIP.

A short letter, a note.

"Boy, car' dis scrip to Mis' Jackson."

Cf.—"The postman had brought a scrip" Kent. Notes and Queries 1874. *English Dialect Dictionary* queries "Obsolete?"

SELF.

A common intensitive. Even.

Bakra (to old man, handing in letter):—"Who wrote this?"

Old man:—"Me se'f."

The letter is an appeal for charity.

Bakra:—"Don't your children support you?"

Old man:—"Sah! Dem no want tell me how-dye se'f."

Harassed Uncle:—"Mosquita! Dey no wan' fo' me lay down a bed self."

Veteran (recalling old days when he had whisky, Madeira wine, and other high-class waters at Christmas time):—"Now me no tas'e one drop hardwood (common rum) self!"

SING.

Song.

Man (at a ring-party) :—" Listen me. Among you ready ? A gwine t'row one sing."

So.

For example.

" When I go in the cane-piece, so, [in such places as the cane-piece] I look fo' Bitter Tally."

So long as.

Girl :—" Ma'am, a want fo' go to de shop."

Woman :—" A'right. So you ent stay long."

SOFTLY.

With caution—be careful !

Woman :—" But when Daddy been young he been a fight-man. When Daddy get he little likka an' t'ing—Oho, you sa.—"

Daddy :—" Tan' safly !"

The use of the word in 1 Kings, xxi, 27 strikes one as apt :—

" And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly."

SO TILL.

Until, at long last.

Old man (describing a boxing match) :—" Dey fight, dey fight, dey fight, so-tell, of cou'se, Benjie beat de fight."

Miss Cronise (" West African Folk Tales ") spells this " Sotay " :—
" So Spider do sot-a-y dem beef dey lef' few, no mo."

STAND.

To remain, to stay.

"A been to Berbice, you know."—"Yes? How long you stand?" (How long did you remain there?)

A dilatory messenger is sometimes reproached:—"Goodness gracious, boy! Wha' make you stan' so long?"

Used also in the sense of wait, hold over.

Old woman:—"Daughter, hey is de bitt. A still owe you a gill."

Young woman (kindly):—"Oh dat is a'right, mudda. Leh de gill stand."

One hears this phrase:—"In all me sufferin's an' all me ailments de Reverend neva come wan day fo' see how I stand."

STORY.

A happening.

An "Anansi story" (rightly interpreted) is not a 'Nansi tale—in the sense of a fairy-tale—but a 'Nansi happening, something that happened to Buru 'Nansi.

When anything happens in the market: when one market-woman accuses another of having taken one of her "parcels" of green plantain, the accused person, putting her arms akimbo, and addressing the market-roof, says: "You see story!"

When a row is on, the market-boy calls to his "matty" over the way:—"Ar-chie ay! "Tory a pass hey b'y!"

An unfortunate happening is spoken of as a "bad story": one of the Old Guard, in deep trouble, says "Tory too hebby" (heavy).

"To story" means to fib. Girl (reproachfully):—"You too story!"

STORY DONE.

Finis.

"You and the man don't speak now?"—"Speak! Afta de way da man 'buse me! *M'm-m'm*—story done."

STUDY.

To think, meditate, to consider.

Master (to odd-man-about-the-house, usually remarkably cheerful—on slight grounds—but to-day unwontedly depressed):—"What-ever is wrong with *you*?"

Odd-man-about-the-house (chin on hand):—"I'm studyin'."

Cf. Lancashire:—"What arto studyin' abeawt, owd crayter?"

SWEET.

Pleasant, gratifying.

"She had a sweet funeral."

"Ow! A-we parson. He's a sweet minister."

Anything top-notch is "too sweet." Hassar-soup (said a Mud-head) is "sweet too bad."

SWEET-MOUTH.

Flattery, blarney.

McTurk ("Quow") has an improving little fable "No make Sweet Mout' mo' 'an you."

['Monk' Lewis—"Journal of a Jamaica Proprietor"—says that among the negroes "Congo—saw" meant flattery. An old gold-digger in British Guiana spoke of a man who worked with him as having "plenty congussa."]

TAKE CARE.

Could it be that.

"Boy, a loss a bit."—"Yes, ma'am. Take ca'e you drop it in de shop?"

TAKE IN: TAKE DOWN.

Fall sick.

To "take in," probably, may mean to have to keep to the house; to be "taken down," probably, to have to take to one's bed.

"Janey sick."—"Yes? When she take in?"

"When he take down?—He take down Tuesday."

Cf.—Perth:—"Gude grant he bena ta'en down wi' a fivver on the tap o't."

TALL ' TALL.

Not at all, not at all.

Bakra (to Yoruba woman in British Guiana) :—"No more K'romanty (negroes) there now?"

Woman shaking her head :—" 'Tall ' tall ! "

TEETH.

A set of strong, white teeth was a striking feature of the old black people. White teeth are the natural ornament of the Black; and by the use of such tooth-sticks as black-sage &c. the Old Guard were careful to keep their teeth in fine condition even to a great age.

When the Negro smiled, one recalled the lines quoted in Charles Lamb's essay "The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers." It was as when

A sable cloud

Turns forth her silver lining on the night.

Two or three phrases mention the teeth.

"Every skin teet' no laugh" is an old Negro proverb—most significant as the worldly wisdom of a Race so long in the shadow of Slavery.

A sulky child is told sharply :—"Wha' you suck you teeth' fo?"—sucking the teeth being the sharp withdrawal of tongue from teeth, resulting (almost) in the sort of click one makes when driving a horse. It is the negro—woman or child most usually—in the sulks. With eyes lowered, and lips pouting, it pictures disgust, discontent,—rebellion with the lid on.

THE.

A common redundancy.

Man (whom one does not remember to have set eye on before) :—"Boss, wha' you gwine gi'e me for the Christmas?"

Black lady (in a brown study) :—"Well, times is so hard, I dunno what I goin' do for the August."

Phrases heard are :—

"I got the fever"; "I gettin' the cough"; "I got the bad feeling."

"I mus' gi'e she de credit, Mudda Endor try she bes'," says Mudda Reubens. "She gi'e she de sweet sage an' de bitta tally, an' de man pyabba, de stingin' nettle, an' everyt'ing, but—de Lo'd did will it oddawise."

—Van Sertima, *Sketches of Demerara Life*.

THE, THAT, THIS, THERE, THEN.

Th (light) becomes *t*—the *h* is dropped—as *t'ing*, *t'ree*, &c.

Th (heavy) becomes *d*, as *de* (the), *dat* (that), *dis* (this), *dere* (there), *den* (then).

The old Negro, I believe, is positively unable to sound *th*—"me tongue no able fo' bring am." as he says. With the younger people it is not so much inability as laziness, the desire of tropic man to do a thing in the easiest fashion possible.

Between the talk of the cultured Negro with whom this book has nothing to do, and the talk of the cultured European, there is absolutely no difference at all.

It is interesting to note that the inability to sound—or grudge against—*Th* may be found in Kent, Sussex and the Shetland Islands.

Cf.—Sussex. "I can't swallow nohows in de wurreld."

Shetland :—"She flang dem i' da pan."

Kent :—"He said dere was a fare."

Shetland :—"Dis aft occurs."

Shetland :—"Mair den I sud say."

TIME.

Daddy Quashie takes but little stock of time in its minute divisions. The African day fell into three parts,—morning, noon and night. Minutes and seconds did not exist. Yet travellers—European or American—rushing round the West Indies on a time-limit complain that the Negro is not punctual. Not punctual! He is wonderfully punctual,—considering. You cannot knock the grandfather out of your blood by the simple act of putting an Ingersoll watch in your vest-pocket.

Several quaint phrases are used as to time.

"Long time," "before time," "first time," means many, many years ago.

"Long time children had manners," says the veteran; "dis time they spoil, done."

"Dis time no like befo' time," is a common phrase with the old people.

"Fus' time" says the frail old man, "cha!"—his eye brightening—"a was a man fo' myse'f."

"Good Time" (or "Good Day") was a slave-time phrase for such holidays as Christmas, New Year, Easter and the like.

"A-h," said an old woman—gone underground with all her memories

of a day that is past,—“Good Tem a-we slave do well. A-we dance! A-we yeat! A-we pledja! Good Tem! Ky! A-we massa fo’ a-we se’f.”

The black people do not describe the lapse of Time in the terms of a stop-watch.

“How long has the boy been away?”—“*Too long.*”

“When did the gardener come?”—“He just. just now come in the gate.”

TINNIN.

Tin.

“He does beat a tinnin fo’ frighten away de birds from de corn.

TOO BAD.

An intensive.

Anything “bad too bad” or “sweet too bad” is bad or sweet in the highest degree.

The tone of a drum is “sweet too bad”; the boy in the next yard is “bad too bad.”

“Did you dance?”

“Sah, ah was a dance-man you see me hey. Ah greedy dance too bad.”

“Daddy Quashie.” *W. I. Committee Circular*, May 19, 1914.

TOO BESIDES.

A redundancy, regarded as emphatic.

“Wo’k sah! A can’ get no wo’k. And too besides a is a man no able fo’ wo’k a cane-piece.”

TRY BEST.

Phrase of the King of Optimists.

“Well, uncle, how are you getting on?”—“Massa, me a try best.”

UNCLE.

A term of respect for an old man. It does not necessarily imply relationship.

“No Uncle a pass dey ’pon de dam?”

Old man :—“Mornin’, me bwoy.”

Young man :—“Morning, uncle.”

Cf.—Somerset :—“I yeard th’ old Uncle Joe Moggs, down to quay, tell o’t.”

UP.

A common redundancy.

"I met up Jane to-day."

"I met up with him in Water Street."

"The dog bit up the boy" (bit him badly).

A shop is said to be "full up wi' people."

UPSTARTED.

Bumptions.

"He! He very upstarted!"

Black woman :—"He's an upstarted nigger-man!"

VERY WELL.

When Daddy Quashie tells a 'Nansi story it is pointed here and there with "Very well" thus :—

So, now, Buri 'Nansi when he come out a Tiger hole, he 'tragihten (made straight for) fo' Buru Rabbit. Be'y well. He wa'k, he wa'k, he wa'k, t-a-y he meet da place Buru Rabbit a make he ho'se. Be'y well."

The pause in the narrative—the sort of *Selah* note of the Psalms—is effective as oratory; it marks the stages of the drama or the comedy or the tragedy; you are not rushed through the tale but have time to taste the full flavour of its every surprise, repartee and bit of humour.

"Very well" is a favourite ejaculation of the sympathetic listener.

Man (excitedly) :—"I tell him, say, if you don' loose de jackass I will know wha' fo' do."

Friend :—"Very well."

The sense is :—Quite so, naturally, most natural in the circumstances.

"Very well" may sometimes mean in abundance, in great plenty.

Coast friend :—"Are there many monkeys there?"

Bushman :—"Oh yes, I saw monkeys very well."

This has no reference to the clearness or otherwise of the bushman's vision, but is a simple statement that he saw plenty of monkeys.

Very well may mean "Doubtless."

Veteran (complaining of a man who has brought "eye-pass" to him) :—"Me old very well but me no dead yet."

(I am old, doubtless, but that is not to say that I am dead and may be ignored.)

VEX.

Vexation,—that trouble of the soul to its very depths,—is not characteristic of the Negro. Thunderstorms of fury sweep across him but they do not last; the sun breaks through again, usually, within an hour or two. He is a child of the tropics. A word he is very fond of, however, is “vex” and “vexation.”

“Don’t trouble me,” says the woman, pouting; “I vex.”

WALK.

The old people use the word of inanimate things.

A road is so bad, “cart no able fo’ walk dey.”

A veteran said he had never seen such an abundance of plantains in the market “since bateau a walk.”

To “take walk” does not necessarily mean to go on Shank’s mare. I proposed to take a trip to Barbados. “You right,” said Daddy Quashie; “might as well take walk.”

WANT.

To be inclined to.

Of a man who had been told some home truths:—“Sah, da man bex! *Bex!* He look like he want ketch fits.”

[With the Old Guard the letter *V* is unknown. Its place is taken by *B e.g.*, Bex, (vex) berry, (very) ribba (river) &c.]

WARES.

Ware.

Messenger:—“The mistress sen’ me fo’ the wares.”

Cf.—“Gather up thy wares out of the land.”—Jeremiah x. 17.

WATCHMAN.

To watch.

Woman (to girl):—“Watchman this money fo’ me.”

WATER.

Water-side.

The bank of a river, creek, &c.

"You ent take the plantain out of the boat?"—"Yes, but I lef' am a' (at the) water-side."

Water washing.

Flow of the tide.

"He [the old negro boatman] called for me a little after midnight, and with the quiet remark, 'Water wash a'ready sir,' prepared to carry my baggage to the wharf. Arrived there I saw a small bateau lying on the mud with its farthest end washed by the rising tide."

Rodway, *The Forest People of British Guiana*.

WAYS.

Way.

Woman (to bothersome youngster):—"Go you' ways, boy, go you ways!"

Cf.—Somerset:—"I 'ant no time vor to go home with 'ee, but I'll go a little ways."

WELL.

Very, properly.

"But I say, boy, you well rude." Sometimes "well and—"

Honest person (examining friend's coat):—"H'm. You'll have to put in patches well."

WHA' FO' DO!

Ejaculation of the fatalist Negro.

Mark: it is not a question as it would be with a European or an American. It is an ejaculation, and it is nothing more.

WHA' MAKE ?

Why ? What is the cause of it ?

It was an old " Oku " (Yoruba) woman ; on both cheeks, from ear to mouth, were her " country-marks."

" You no want fo' go back to Africa ? " Said I.

" N-a, na ! "

" Why ? "

" Wha' 'e shay ? "

Her son said, " De massa ax, wha' make ? "

" O-h, wha' make ? *Uh* "—she grunted—" Me go deady. Old no tekky prace ? "

WHICHIN.

Which.

" Well, I got t'ree dolla's whichin I will let you have it wid all me heart, me dear. " Van Sertima, *Sketches of Demerara Life*.

WITHOUT.

Unless.

Porter (gravely) :—" De gentleman laughin' ! Boss, without I get my coppers how I can keep up the Christmas ? "

A black man with whom I had sympathized on his large family—he being very poor—said philosophically :—" God never sends a bird without he sends a berry."

WRONG.

Worst, unfit.

Passenger (looking at leaky bateau) :—" Dis is de *wrong* bateau fo' cross river wit'."

Boy (in furious word-battle with another) :—" I is de *wrong* man fo' play wit,' hear ! I is de *wrong* man."

YOUSE'F.

Et tu Brutus !

Bakra (jocularly, to white-headed veteran) :—" Uncle, I hear you're going to marry again."

Veteran (covering open mouth with his hand) :—" Look me trial ! Man ol' done a'ready—matty a look fo' put am a put-putta—he sa look fo' wef ? Youse'f too ! "

VARIA VARIORUM.

Oratory (it has been said) constitutes the Negro's one fine art. His gift for dramatic speech is undeniable. One has been struck again and again, when listening to an old black man, how terse and vivid his language is. A striking quality is its almost total lack of abstract words. Abstract thought and emotion is expressed in concrete terms ; constant recourse is had to figurative language in order to make such expression possible. And this dramatic, intensely figurative language is not surprising in a Race whose traditions have been carried on quite apart from books. If any of the wisdom of the old people was to be printed on the mind of the young, and to be perpetuated, the cultivation of a striking parabolic style of oratory was vital. With the printing-press, Oratory is going out in Europe. It is the most primitive of all the Arts ; it is an art practised by many of the old black people in British Guiana.

Gesture. An old writer on Africa says :—" The Blacks in their talk have so many Motions that thereby, and by the Accent which gives Life and Force to their Meaning, I could very well apprehend the Purport of what they said in general." Miss Kingsley records a saying of the Bubis :—" Come near the fire that I may see what you say." With the old Negro it may be said almost of a truth that one sees as well as hears what he says. Gesture plays a great part in his talk.

I knew an old woman once. She had been a slave. Once a month she would come to weed the garden.

" Well, old lady, you pull up all them weed good ? "

" You 'sef ! A-ll day, lookoo, Nancy ben'ing over dem weed so !—she pulled up imaginary weeds with some effort from the kitchen floor. " Lookoo ! Nancy wo'k—" she wiped imaginary sweat from her brow.

The simple narrative—heightened by gesture-language—was exceedingly effective.

The Liberated African who came to British Guiana in the

'forties, says :—" I come from Afrukay *so high* "—he puts his hand about four feet from the ground. He was rescued from a Spanish slaver. In the gloom of the hold, " they pack a-we so "—he holds up a hand with the fingers together. Where are his shipmates ? He points to the ground, " All gone ! "

Intonation—" the Accent which gives Life and force to their Meaning "—is an aid to " the one fine Art " which the old people

Intonation.

make use of to the full.

Lengthening the vowel is a favourite habit ; it acts as an intensitive. It takes the place of the word "very" which is non-existent. Ask an old man if a creek is deep : "*D-e-e-p ! Massa ! D-e-e-p !*" One gathers without another word that the creek is deep—" fo true." The sky is black to windward ; Daddy Quashie looks out at the " door-mouth." " We guine get w-a-n rain !" says he, and the Traveller if he is wise does not set out just then.

It is this variety of emphasis—the change of tone—that gives a number of meanings distinctly perceived by the expert ear to an ejaculation, interrogation or interpolation as simple (apparently) as " Eh ! " or " Eh-eh ! " This it is, too, that makes it difficult to reproduce Negro dialect on paper. By *underlining*, etc, the sound may be suggested to those who know the Negro well. One may say—reading a Negro sketch—" I fancy I hear the old man talk " ; but even he will read the dialogue aloud and get it the better in that way. Mr. McTurk's " Fables in the Vernacular " lose half their flavour if read silently to oneself. If one is up to the job—many people are not— they should be read aloud. The late Rev. D. J. Reynolds will be remembered for his inimitable talks—delivered all too rarely—on the old-time Negro.

In the talk of the old Negro an illuminative part is played by the proverb. The old people cannot utter half-a-dozen sentences without a proverb. The Yoruba have a saying :—" A

Proverbs.

proverb is the horse of conversation", which means that a proverb will convey one's meaning in half the time taken by

a more literal method of narration. The saying is true. A proverb lets the hearer into the speaker's meaning quickly.

An old African—a friend of mine : he is now dead and that he died abruptly is the only fault I ever had to find with him—was great in his use of the proverb or “p’rable.” Alluding to the substantial benefits accruing to himself from friendship with a white man he said :—“Kass-kass fowl a nyam good corn,” Wishing to say beware of what you do for the result may be bad he said :—“The child ate a poisonous weed and called it kalalu.”

Upwards of a thousand proverbs in use among the Negroes of British Guiana were published in 1902 by the late Rev. James Speirs, minister of St. Clement's Parish, Berbice.*

The late Rev. D. J. Reynolds has a paper on Jamaica Proverbs in “Timehri” (1890). “By those who are acquainted with the idiom of the old-time negroes of the West Indies,” says Mr. Reynolds, “the wit and humour which sparkle from their proverbs will be fully appreciated.”

Ellipsis. A striking feature of “Black Talk,”—touched on in the chapter “African Traits in Negro English”—deriving as I believe from the Dark Continent itself—is the use of ellipsis: There is word-ellipsis—ellipsis proper—and then there is letter-ellipsis—“clipping”

To take word ellipsis. It is amazing how—when he likes—a black man says a thing. He practises the utmost economy in words. His sentence has the brevity of a cable-gram at war rates. It is like a man crossing a stream by jumping from one to another of half-a-dozen ford-stones.

* For Jamaica a similar work was done by Dr. Izett Anderson and Mr. Frank Cundall, F. S. A. The result of their collection—737 proverbs in all—were published by the Institute of Jamaica in 1910 under the title: “Jamaica Negro Proverbs and Sayings.”

In this ellipsis he is no respecter of words. Now it is the relative pronoun that goes by the board ; now the article ; now the preposition ; now the conjunction ; now part of the verb. Take these sentences. The words in brackets are mine.

Pronoun.—Jane :—" Eh-Eh ! I thought (it) was Susan." Sarah—" I is de body (who) do it." Beggar : " Do, boss ! Even if (it) is a cent."

Article.—" I lef' the plantain a' (lit. at the) water-side." " He gwine be (the) chief man at the Fancy Ball."

Preposition.—" Gi'e me (a) piece (of) stick " Jane—" A'right Me s'a wait (for) you." Woman (angrily) : " I gwine complain (of) this boy."

Conjunction.—" True or true not, I speak it (and) g'ie you." " Boy, come run (and) go (to) Jose shop."

Verb.—" You must try (to) get 'way." Buyer to huckster) :—" What (have) you got ? What (are) you selling ?" Quow (narrating incident) : " Dem stock begin (to) halla."

Then we come to letter-ellipsis,—“clipping.” It has been said that the black man clips his letters, often, because he cannot sound two particular consonants together.

S before a hard consonant is dropped invariably. Scrape becomes 'crape ; skin, 'kin ; speak, 'peak ; steady, 'teady ; stick, 'tick ; squeeze, 'queeze, &c.

R, ER, OUR, he particularly abhors. Final R, ER, or OUR, disappears ; its place is taken by the long a, as harba (harbour.) Medial r, goes by the board. Careless becomes ca'eless ; sharp, sha'p ; turn, tu'n.

The first syllable of a word is dispensed with frequently. It is a supererogation of labour to pronounce it. Thus be-headed, allowance becomes 'lowance ; deceitful, 'ceitful ; oblige, 'blige ; occasion, 'casion ; and remember, 'membra.

Among the pure African Blacks—the old “Salt-Waters”—pruning is more rigorous even than among the Creole Blacks. The respected Dr. Johnson—not to say the later Richard Webster—would turn in his grave were he to hear English as clipped by some of the Yoruba Nation “in the Canal.” “Mi'le night” means “middle night ;” e'tate, estate ; “ab'e”, able ; “pa'", path. “Bakara ; Me beggy you ! Min' de pa.”

But if there is one thing noteworthy about

Redundancy. Daddy Quashie it is that he is contradictory

He is a bundle of impulses ; he is also a bundle of contradictions. He is suspicious sometimes and at other times immensely gullible, He is thick-skinned and thin-skinned within a minute. So it is not surprising to find—the surprising thing would be not to find—that he who is elliptical in one sentence is diffuse and redundant in the next.

A stone is not a stone to him, but it is something more, it is a “rockstone ;” a cock is not a cock but a “fowl-cock ;” a sow is not a sow but a “sow-pig.” (A sparrow in Barbados is a “sparrow-bird.”) When the woman in the next yard bids her “boy-child” bathe, she must needs add that he is to “bathe his skin.” When she threatens punishment—which is a sort of diurnal occurrence—it is : “Jarge, I goin’ beat you skin to-day, believe me to Fathers.”

The double negative is common. Visitor (anxiously, apropos of sick child):—“You musn’t gi’e he no pap.” In the last Note we saw that the preposition is not infrequently left out. It is likewise put in sometimes when there is no need for it. Friend (discussing the illness of a neighbour) :—“They gave him too much a (of) quinine.” As for verbs, redundancy is common : “He go go hit the man.” “He come come tell me he ent gi’in’ me the money !”

For the sake of euphony apparently—and if so this is a typical African trick—a consonant is interpolated between two words. “Old man, does this farm pay you ?” “Sah me a get li’l bit out a r’am.” A veteran will say he is so old now he “no able fo’ n’use shovel and hoe.” Another asked as to whether an old pear tree still bears said he does get “One-one pear off’r it.”

Soliloquy. The habit of talking aloud to himself—more usually herself—is rather going out.

One is yet, however, admitted to the grievance of a servant against her mistress as she goes down the road, or of a washer as she scrubs “the white people clo’es” and hangs them gently against rusty iron on the paling. The

habit of soliloquy is more common in Africa. Miss Kingsley says:—"I fancy the main body of the lower class of Africa think externally instead of internally. Some of this talking is, I fancy, equivalent to our writing. I know many English people who, if they want to gather a clear conception of an affair, write it down; the African not having writing, first alks it out."

The old order dieth out and giveth place
Old v. New. to the new.

An old man was telling me all he knew about the *Adopi*, the little hairy creature, human in shape but with four fingers on the hand and with knees that cannot bend, which is said to live in the bush.

"People 'fraid *Adopi* too much," said the old man. "Walk a bush a night you got fo' carry fire-'tick."

His grandson a lad of seventeen was at the door. He smiled, and interpreted:—"Grandpa mean a torch."

"What is this *Adopi*?"

"Well, sah, *Adopi* is a kind a little men a de bush."

"I do believe they call them dwarf," said the boy.

"Wha' da?"

"Dwarf. In fact," said the lad, sinking us ever deeper, "the righted name is Lilliputian."

"Hi!" said the old man, with a twinkle, "Take ca'e you'se'f! You ever hea' da name sah?"

I told him I didn't think *Adopi* were called that; they were just dwarfs, little people. "Very well!" said the old man. "Dis boy is always comin' in wi' them heavy word."

NEGRO DIALECT IN BARBADOS.

The Barbados Negro is African in hue and to a large extent in outlook, but hardly otherwise, and certainly not so in dialect. In British Guiana, and also in Jamaica, a few African words are current in common talk. In Barbados, if any African words do survive—*Ku-Ku* may be African, and also *Unna* meaning We or You—they are very few indeed, and are insignificant in comparison with the larger, the “newer,” British Colonies where the African strain is much stronger than in so venerable a British Plantation as “far Barbadoes on the Western Main.” For two hundred and ninety years the British flag has flown over the Island,—that and no other. The fact is reflected in Black as well as in White; it appears in the form as well as in the substance of his talk. The Barbados Negro is an English rustic in a black skin.

Climbing a narrow road one day in that wild and rugged part of Barbados which the early settlers with no complimentary allusion to North Britain called “Scotland,” a black woman looked up from hoeing in a sweet-potato field. The sky was black. A grey curtain hid the horizon; it was raining heavily out at sea.

“Master!” cried the woman, “we goin’ get a set of rain.”

I remembered a phrase of Daniel Defoe’s (written early in the 18th century):—“I have been through a set of misfortunes,” and I thought, What is this old black woman, hoeing sweet potatoes in Barbados, doing with a phrase of Daniel Defoe’s? How did this old word-sense get out to Barbados, to take root in the vocabulary of a black woman! When did it come, and if long ago—as seemed likely—how had it been perpetrated? And then I got a surprise another day. It was again in the uplands of Barbados—the air a mixture of sea-wind and muscovado sugar—and a small urchin of a black boy, his white teeth at work on a bit of cane that had fallen from a bullock-cart, stopped for just half a moment and said:—

“Mister. I beg a pension.”

“A what?” said I.

"A pension."

"What is a pension, boy?"

He grinned, and fell upon the cane again. And then when I was down the road:—"Mis-ter! I beg a pension!"

That night I ransacked the few damp books that from some quarter or other—probably from half-a-dozen quarters—had got into the Bay-house; and there, luckily enough, I unearthed a Dictionary. I looked for *Pension*. There was the usual;—"A stated allowance to a person in consideration of past services", and then:—"A gratuity, a present (*Obsolete*"), Obsolete! Not so obsolete as thou thinkest, master dictionary-maker.

The problem was worth looking into a little.

Barbados midway in the 17th century was rather different to Barbados now. Thick bush covered most of the Island,—such forest, as, in much attenuated form, is shown to the tourist at "Turner's Hall" woods. Here and there is a Boyling House, turning out "wet sugar" that looks for all the world like tar. Here and there is a patch of ginger—its red flowers glowing in the strong sunlight—or a clump of tall tobacco, beautiful glossy green, but such villainous tobacco to smoke, says an eminent Historian, as is surely nowhere else to be found in all the world. And here is a bush-path, threading its way between the trees, dipping now and again into a gully, and finally finding its way to the salt sea and the pestiferous mangrove swamp where is the Indian Bridge.

And in the path, this bright day two hundred and fifty years ago, what do we see? A Somerset Bondservant, driving an ass, and accompanied by a Negro. The two are taking a few pounds of the wet sugar, aforesaid—in leather bags slung over the donkey's back—down to the Bay, there to be put, together with many other pounds brought down similarly laboriously, into a Store, pending the arrival of a little Barbados-man (75 tons) which is even now sturdily fighting her way, ever westward, in mid Atlantic.

Was the Somerset man a mute? Was the Negro deaf?

I ask those questions. They concern the "planting" of the English language in far Barbados.

Dust has settled on many of the old Barbados Records, damp has discoloured them and made the pages brittle so

that they break almost in the turning. There is yet a vast of interest in those old papers if one will but burrow among them with patience and enthusiasm.

Upon November 6, 1655, it is recorded how "upon information by Captain Richard Goodall and Mr. John Jones, as also by a letter from Lieut.-Col. John Higginbotham," it is ordered that Lieut.-Col. Higginbotham have power to raise a company of soldiers to follow, and, if possible, to secure, and if impossible, to destroy, "several Irish servants and, Negroes" out in Rebellion "in ye Thicketts and thereabouts." "Ye Thicketts" was in St. Philip's Parish; and "thereabouts" might be anywhere along the windward coast, from Consetts Point to Joe's River. There is many a cave below Cliff,—a fine hiding-place for the runaways. I have looked into one or two of them—dark caverns running deep into the rock. In "Notes and Queries," in 1876, a paragraph appeared. "West Indian Negroes, especially Barbadians," said the writer, "use certain words and phrases one never hears in England, but which are commonly heard in Ireland." Unfortunately he did not mention them. And then he adds:—"Partly at least, this may be the result of the extensive transplantation of the Anglo-Irish to Barbados by Cromwell in the 17th century." Doubtless indeed! There must have been, surely, absorption at least of the Irish fashion of talk by the Negro when they colloqued together, those two runaways, the White and the Black, in the caves and holes of the earth "in ye Thicketts and thereabouts."

The old words and idioms having been planted it is not surprising that they have been perpetuated. Barbados is the hub of the West Indian Universe, Its harbour is the busiest in the Caribbean. In the narrow streets of Bridgetown one rubs shoulders with travellers from all parts of the world. They all "have a move on." And yet, at heart, Barbados is intensely conservative. As a visitor to the island I trust it may long remain so. It is this atmosphere of the old world that constitutes one of the strangest, most restful attractions of the Island. To stand on the tower of St. John's Church on a clear day, and survey the points of fifty wind-mills, slowly revolving in the sea breeze, is one of the most restful, nerve-quieting experiences I know. And when one gets into the more rural parishes—St. Peter or St. Lucy—

where the great rollers break in thunder on the sheer cliff, and an old negro comes out, with a black goat and an iron pig, and tethers the animal on the sour-grass at a safe distance from the Cliff-edge, as he has tethered many another goat at any time these fifty years, we get into the atmosphere where, a word or word-sense being properly rooted, it is likely to grow and flourish to a very green old age indeed.

To the old Negro Barbados is the prime article of belief. This great Cliff he knows, and the sea below and the withered, wind-swept pasture above. The outer world is but a rumour, inadequately authenticated.

It is extraordinary how old words rejoice and grow to vigorous age in this quiet atmosphere. One notices it, for example, in the place-names, in the names of the fields of a plantation. Fields are not numbered here as in Demerara ; they are named. The practice happily associates them with the human being who owned the field once—who worked its red or black soil for a span of years—and then became as the dust of the field himself, after the fashion of humanity. Ask a labourer—"What is the name of this field?" He replies, "Ginger Hill." "Ginger Hill ! Do they grow ginger here?" "No, my master." He points to the sugar-canes which speak for themselves surely. "Ginger Hill is a kyane-piece." "Why is it called Ginger Hill then?" He does not know. He had never asked. He had never thought about it. His father called it Ginger Hill before him, and he does. The old people had their own way of doing a thing and their own reasons for doing it ; they might have been able to tell the stranger what he wanted to know, but they are all dead.

And so with many and many a field throughout the length and breadth—not so very long and not so very broad, yet packed with half-forgotten history—of Barbados. Sometimes one gets an explanation. This field is called "Pot-house Hill," because there used to be a pottery in it ; that Spring Patch because "it had a spring into it"—the spring disappeared a full century ago ; this Monkey Hill because there was a wood near which had plenty of monkeys—a solitary fustick tree is on the Hill now ; that Graveyard because it used to be a burial-ground, a number of lead coffins had been dug up in it from time to time.

The characteristics of the field, the leading feature which gave the field its name, went out long ago, perhaps a hundred years age,—but the name has stuck. It is the Barbados way.

A striking instance of how a word, once rooted—in Barbados—declines to be extirpated is to be found in Bridgetown. Visitors to Barbados know "Trafalgar Square," and the statue of Horatio Nelson, honoured where he had been execrated, heading a letter "Barbarous Island." Well, in 1721 this piece of ground was a grass-plot, a green, owned by Captain Jeremiah Egginton. The fact is recorded in a Plan of Bridgetown by Mayo, "Egginton's Green" was far too long a name for the vulgar mind to remember; hence the place was called simply, "The Green." In time the Green ceased to be Egginton's; Captain Jeremiah Egginton was dead. Later on the Green itself went out. It was no longer a grass-plot. It had been turned into a street. Last of all, it was named officially—and was duly labelled in white lettering on a blue background—"Trafalgar Square." The Green, the grass-plot went out, but "The Green" as a name for this particular part of Bridgetown declined to go out. It stuck. It had taken root in the people's vocabulary; and there it remained. Ask a lad to-day, "Boy, run to the Green and fetch a cab;" it is "Trafalgar Square" he goes to, and nowhere else. He twigs at once.

Another example occurs to me. In St. Joseph's Parish, there is a village which used to rejoice in the name of Crab Hole. It was called Crab Hole for the obvious reason that a species of Crustacæa—whether the white, black or red land-crab I know not—had made a crabbery there and the ground around about was full of holes made by crabs. Then a Reverend gentleman came along—his piety is remembered—and he was shocked to find so vulgar a name existing, and even flourishing, within his parish. So the Powers-that-Be were approached; and in due time an edict was issued changing the name from Crab Hole to "St. Elizabeth's Village." What has been the result? The Post Office knows the village as "St Elizabeth's Village"; but to its inhabitants it is still "Crab Hole. I trust it may remain so.

So it is that—with the old strong crusted-conservative

spirit of Barbados—the old word, the old word-sense introduced during the spacious days of the 17th century and afterwards, persists and is found in vigorous life in Barbados in unsequestered parts,—to the surprise and delight of the wandering Philologist.

BARBADOS WORD NOTES.

ALTERATE.

Alter.

A black man said :—" To-night the moon will alterate."

ASS-NEGER.

Ligon—" History of Barbados " (1651)—says :—" Assinegoes are here of exceeding great use in the Island in carrying our sugars down to the Bridge." In a foot-note to " Cavaliers and Roundheads in Barbados " (1887) Mr. N. Darnell Davis remarked :—" When Barbadian negroes called donkeys 'Ass-negers,' they merely used the old Spanish word in a corrupt form."

I never heard a Barbados negro call his donkey an " Ass-neger," myself. A Barbados correspondent supplies this suggestive note :—

" I never heard the expression you mention with regard to a donkey, but the idea is certainly there or used to be. In the late 'seventies I happened to say something to a planter about a 'negro.' 'Better avoid that word,' he said, 'there is no term of abuse the people hate as much as to be called a nigger.' Why, he did not say, but some time afterwards seeing the word 'assinegoe' in a Deed I wondered whether the reason for the hatred of the word 'nigger' was that it was looked upon as calling a man an animal. I asked another much older planter about this, and he said, 'Oh yes, I have often heard one say, I ain't a nigger; look the nigger tied up to the pear-tree.'"

BROGUES.

A kind of rough shoe.

A very old Negro, talking of " before-time " in Barbados, said :—" Most of us, of course, went bare-foot. But there was one old man, I remember, wore brogues."

Cf. Paddianna (1848) :—" Never mind their feet; sure they've their brogues on".

CREATURE.

A term applied to persons, expressive either of contempt or pity.

I asked a black woman :—" Who is that woman ? ", indicating a Red Leg. She said :—" She's a creature what lives lowerside."

In colloquial use in Great Britain.

EDDOS, OR EDDARS.

Mr. J. Rodway, F. L. S. points out that Eddos or Eddars is the obsolete name of an English arum—*Arumaculatum*—called Lords and Ladies or Cuckoo pint. The West Indian Eddos is of the same arum family, and of course has very similar leaves.

Several of the plants in the West Indies get their common names, probably, from plants in the Old Country to which they have some real or fancied resemblance.

ESS.

An amazing corruption of If.

"Soley ! Ess you stan' there too long the Police goin' hold yo.'"

EXPLETIVES.

Sheriff Brumell, in "Demerara after Fifteen Years of Freedom" (1853) says of the Barbadian Immigrant :— "His idiom is purer than that of the Creole negro. But he is principally distinguished by a most extraordinary fertility of imagination in the invention of oaths and expletives." The author gives no examples of the expletives in question ; he was a Stipendiary Justice of the Peace. One wishes he had. The Barbadian expletives of sixty years ago were probably more extraordinarily "fertile," more pungent, even than those of to-day.

As an affirmation, "' Deed, fait' ", (" Indeed and in Faith ") jointly or severally, is in common demand. An esteemed correspondent tells me that in his young days, ' Deed was regarded as almost an oath,—Faith as very binding.

"Cat scratch ma !" has gone out a little I think.

"Dawg boite ma !" is still in use.

"Dawg boite ma, an' sparrow blow ma !" may be heard, upon extraordinary occasion.

FOREIGNER.

Any stranger—any "hale, black-avis'd man of an o'ersea look"—is "a foreigner."

In the 17th century the English of one town called those of the neighbouring towns and villages, "Foreigners."

GREAT HOUSE.

Proprietor's or manager's house on a Plantation.

Throughout the West Indies at one time, and in Guiana, this term was general. It came from Old England where the labourer called the Squire's house the Great House. The name has died out in British Guiana. Barbados sticks to an old word better; hence the black people still allude to the Great House.

Labourer :—"Daw is the mill, an' daw is the boiling-house, an' daw—upperside the mahogany-tree—is the Great House."

HUKKUM.

How comes it?

This is brevity with a vengeance.

Huckster No 1 :—"Trouble ketch me to-day!"

Huckster No 2 :—"Hukkum?"

JACK.

A small tin cup. Rather rare, I think.

Cf. Lincoln :—

"I'll tell you a tale

Of a jack of ale."

JOUK.

To pierce.

A valued correspondent—now, alas, dead, despite the life-giving sea—wind of St. Joseph's parish—gave me this note :—"Now and again one hears such phrases as the following :—'Boy, I'll give you a jouk,' or, 'I'll jouk out your eye.' When I was a child I was told that this was a very vulgar expression. Really it is a corruption of an heraldic term. The word was *jupe*, to pierce. Hence *jupon*, a coat of mail to prevent piercing. The Negroes probably got it from the Scots by whom French terms of heraldry were frequently used."

K.

Used in place of T. sometimes.

"Uh ain't did stan' fo' tie muh head but run ouk in the street."

"De policemens pull muh 'bouk an' push muh."

Cordle. *Overheard* : Verses in Dialect. (1903)

LONESOME.

Lonely.

Black woman :—" It does be lonesome up here at night. "

MASTER.

This archaism, pleasanter than the modern "Sir," is common. Charles Stuart, making away after Worcester, was noticed by a woman gleaning in a field. She called :—" Master, don't you see a troop of horse before you ? "

The speaker might have been a black woman among the sweet potatoes in Barbados :—" Master, don't you see the rain coming ? "

MEAT.

Food for animals or birds, provender for horses or cattle.

Foreigner (to woman in field, picking up cane-tops) :—" Well, old lady, what are you doing ? "

Woman :—" Gathering meat for the stock, my master. "

The part of Bridgetown—just by the "Ca'nash"—where bundles of fodder are sold, used to be known to many of the black people as the "meat market."

The "Natural History of Barbados," by Griffith Hughes (1750), describes Duck's Meat to be "a kind of weedes hovering above the water in pondes."

Cf. North Ireland :—" The horse dos'nt take his mate now at all. "

MISTRESS.

Used commonly in place of Mrs.

"What is the lady's name ?"—" Mistress Jones. "

PEETLE.

People.

An amazing corruption, originating I know not whither.

"Uh hear de peetle by the Bay was gi'in' away sea-beef."

Cordle. *Overheard.*

POTTING.

Taking the green muscovado sugar out of the coolers and filling it into barrels or hogsheads.

The "black sugar" of early Barbados was filled, for the purpose of draining off its molasses, not into barrels or hogsheads, but into "Potts," made of wood and later of clay. A Planter would send his friend at the Bridge a "pot of sugar" at Christmas-time. The Sugar Pot has long since passed out of use; its place has been taken by the barrel and the hogshead. The word survives however. A Barbados planter will say, as his forebear did two hundred years ago:—"I started potting to-day."

PRETTY.

Prettily, well.

Man:—"Joe is a gre-at fisherman, be! He does catch fish pretty." Considerable.

Stranger:—"How old is the old man?"

Woman:—"I don't justly know. But he is a pretty age,—'deed, a very pretty age."

Cf.—Sussex. "A pretty way"—a longish way.

RAMBLE.

To get lost.

Black woman (to stranger, exploring the woods below Cliff):—"Take care you ramble!"

RIDICULOUS.

Writing in "Notes and Queries" (1890), the late Mr. G. H. Hawtayne ("X Beke") said:—"Ridiculous" is used in Barbados, where many old-time expressions survive, to mean strange, unexpected, untoward. A man once informed me that the death by drowning of a relation was most ridiculous."

ROAD.

The highway, or turnpike, is the "Broad Road." Sometimes it is the "King road," in distinction to a private road.

SET.

A number, a quantity.

We have noted this word already ; the old woman in the field, " We goin' get a set of rain."

It is the odd word-sense more commonly heard perhaps than any other in Barbados.

An old man told me he had been a big fiddler in his younger days--he had done "a set of playing" for the white folks : in those days said he, 'deed, the white folks did "a set of dancing."

[Mr. G. J. Chester notes this word along with some other peculiar Barbados expressions in his "Transatlantic Sketches" (1869).]

SOLEY OR SOULIE.

Perhaps the affectionate diminutive of soul.

A term of endearment used to a woman, usually by a woman.
"Soley ! I gone."

TAKING A VIEW.

Synonym for "taking a look."

Foreigner (pointing to the red points of a windmill, slowly revolving) :—"What is the name of that estate?"

Labourer :—"Daw ? Gu' dear ! Daw is Cleaver's."

Foreigner :—"Cleaver's ? I see. Thanks."

He resumes his walk.

Labourer :—"You are a stranger ?"

Foreigner :—"Yes."

Labourer :—"Of course. Taking a view of the Island."

In the Barbados Records of the 17th Century one reads how the Council after one of its remittent debates on the dilapidation of the defences, "proceeded to take a view of the fortifications."

TOT.

A small tin pot or cup,

Old crone (looking in at boiling-house door) :---" Wuhloss ! Don.' hard 'pon ma, I only axin for a tot a sling !"

Men on wet Saturday nights ask for "a tot of rum."

Cf. Yorkshire :—"A tot a hooam brew'd."

UM.

It (in the nominative case, only)

This is peculiar to Barbados.

“ Um ain’t true, bo, um ain’t true ! ”

UNNA.

We, you.

“ Unna goin’ now, now, to the Bay.”

Cuffie de Poole :—“ Bruddahs, has unna observe de trend uv de times ? ” *Weekly Illustrated Paper.*

Is this a survival—an almost solitary one, if so—of Africa in Barbados ?

Cf. “ Oonah come, oonah come quick! De King cow wan’ fo’ go inside hole ! ”

Cronise : *Fables of West Africa.*

WULLAY

An exclamation of surprise, grief, &c.

First Woman :—“ John dead ! ”

Second Woman :—“ Wullay ! ”

This is good old English. *Cf.* “ The Canterbury Tales; Tale of the Man of Lawe : ”—

And whan that he this pitous lettre sey,
Ful ofte he seyde ‘ alas ! ’ and ‘ weylawey. ’ ”

One recalls Ramsay’s beautiful lines :—

“ O waly, waly up the bank
And waly, waly down the brae.”

The word may have fallen from the lips of a poor Highlander banished to Barbados after Dunbar, and lamenting

“ The lone shieling on the misty island.”

“ Wuhloss ” is a variant of “ Wullay.”

VERMIN.

An offensive animal, not necessarily of the smaller kind.

An old man said he had never been to Demerara, and would never go. “ He heard there were a many varmint in that bush.”

Cf. Devon :—“ There’s a sight ov varmint above the varm, vather.”

A NOTE ON VOWEL PRONUNCIATION.

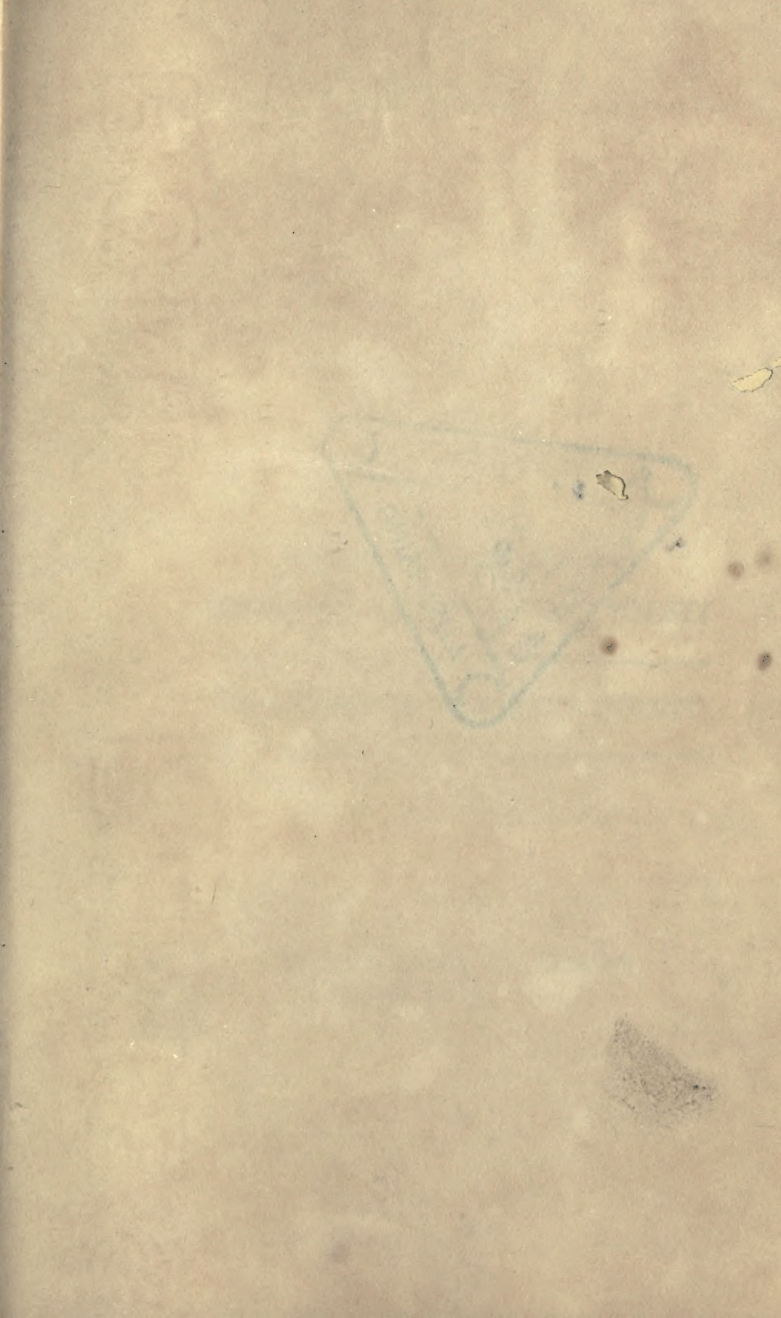
As regards vowels, the Barbados Negro has certain peculiarities which mark him at once as a native of "Bimshire."—the "tight little Island."

- (a) He puts *y* before the medial *a*. Thus car becomes kyar ; garden. gyarden ; cane, kyane, &c.
- (b) He puts a broad *a* after the medial *o* ; sometimes after the final *o*. Thus open becomes oapen ; don't. doan't ; both, boath ; home, whooam ; and No, almost, No-ah.
- (c) His short *e* becomes short *i* sometimes. Thus chest becomes chist ; kettle, kittle ; umbrella, umbrilla ; tremble, trimble. Sometimes it becomes *ai*. Hawker :—"Sea-aigges !Get yo'r sea-aigges !"
- (d) He changes long *i* into *oi*, as the Irish do. Thus :—fine, foine ; island, oi-lan' &c.

[It is interesting to note that in British Guiana the process is reversed There oil becomes ile ; spoil, spile ; boy, b'y, &c.]

This talk, known as the "Barbados twang," is not a peculiarity which has originated in Barbados. It is not indigenous to Barbados, like Manjack or the Sea-egg. It is an importation. Barbados, true to her British conservative instincts, has conserved it better than anywhere else.—that is all. Halliwell—"Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words" (1881) can supply parallels from the other side the water. They say—perhaps they have given it up, although Barbados has not—neyam for name, doan't for don't, whooam for home in the Isle of Wight ; in Leicestershire they say pleace (place) and feace (face) ; in Somerset booath for both ; a road is a rooad in Warwickshire ; while in Yorkshire a rustic would say—as he would say in Barbados—"My father before ma !"

Barbados is compared with an English county, sometimes, in area. The philologist, walking in its rural places, may wonder whether it is not in fact an English county—or bits of an English, Irish and Scots county—brought west and south, the transplanter first, to better his joke, having painted the common people black.





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